

FALL 2016 סתיו תשע"ז

# HaYidion

הידיעון

COLLABORATION



**PRIZMAH**

Center for Jewish Day Schools



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

In the  
Issue



ELLIOTT RABIN

# Collaboration

*Two are better off than one, for they have greater wages from their labor. ... A threefold cord is not quickly broken. (Kohelet 4:9, 12)*

Welcome to the first Prizmah edition of *HaYidion*! When Theodor Herzl laid out his dream for a Jewish state in then-Palestine, he called it Altneuland, Old-New Land. On a much more modest scale, this issue represents an old-new *HaYidion*. For those of our readers who have been following *HaYidion* for years, you'll notice many new features and columns (discussed below). For others who are reading *HaYidion* for the first time, congratulations on joining the community of day school professionals and lay leaders who read these pages regularly, seeking guidance and inspiration on essential and exciting developments impacting our field. *Brukhim ha-ba'im!*

Collaboration is a natural theme to begin this new issue of *HaYidion*, under the auspices of Prizmah. The merger of the five organizations has unleashed creative energies, surprising synergies, and the sense of tremendous promise in the ways that we can collaborate with each other and the thousands of day school stakeholders. As I type these lines, I sit in an office with 11 of my colleagues, lodged in a start-up suite called WeWork—not surprisingly, the invention of folks from the Start-Up Nation. We are joined by 23 other colleagues spread from Florida to Canada. At our web meetings, the far-flung participants light up the screen like the stones on the High Priest's breastplate. Believing in the importance of in-person collaboration, we recently held a two-day staff retreat where we got to know each other better and discuss ways to advance our work (see p. 64). Our retreat was a microcosm of the day school conference to be held in Chicago next February, where we hope that you will have the opportunity to recharge your batteries and deepen your connections with colleagues from throughout the field.

*HaYidion* itself is of course a collaboration, representing the remarkable generosity of dozens of day school stakeholders and other contributors who are willing to share their knowledge, experiences, initiatives and insights for the benefit of the larger field of Jewish education. Lesser known is the collaboration of our thought partners from the field who serve on *HaYidion's* editorial board—see their names in our masthead at left. The Prizmah staff have all pitched in in numerous ways, some visible in this issue, many others behind the scenes with advice, ideas, expertise and good fellowship. *Acharon acharon chaviv*, I am blessed to share the work of editing with my trusted partner and friend Barbara Davis. Barbara is the retired head of school of the Syracuse Jewish Day School; she is the author of many books—simultaneously!—and can fix an English sentence better than a winner on MasterChef can improve a mediocre dinner. She has taught me the true joy of professional collaboration, with no difference whether we agree or not on a writer's position or period.

Articles in this issue demonstrate an eagerness to embrace new educational paradigms, to rethink the foundations of day school education and revamp programs in ways large and larger, to dream big and do the patient work to follow through. The writers here evince several principles in

action: a willingness to take risks; acknowledging and defying challenges; thinking holistically/globally; and connecting or smashing silos. Authors in the first section take different approaches to solving day school challenges within a larger system of connectivity. **Matsa** and **Hammerman** describe how leading funders in Chicago and Metrowest, New Jersey, have created the infrastructure of collaboration to strengthen all the local day schools at once, while **Fishman** shows a funder doing the same at the national level. **Goren and Malkus** promote the role of research in addressing systemic issues. **Buckman** envisions day schools collaborating within an ecosystem of Jewish establishments to provide a rounded Jewish education. And **Kania and Kramer** lead off the issue with a vision of how major stakeholders from different sectors can collaborate to address the most intractable challenges.

The next series of articles considers the role of day school leadership in fostering collaboration. **Gill** reveals a case where lay leaders needed to disregard accepted best practices in their relationship with professionals in order to reset the course of the school. **Grebenu** recounts the process of ushering a change toward collaborative school culture, and **Lindner** explores the psychological challenges that leaders confront in changing to a collaborative style. Articles by **Hoffman and Rothblum** and by **Kalikow** suggest ways for day school and synagogue leaders to collaborate for mutual benefit, both in recruitment and programming.

A group of short articles included in each issue gives schools an opportunity to present programs and initiatives connected to the theme. Here, eight schools showcase innovative collaborations in which their students are engaged. The final section provides a lens on teacher collaboration. **Powell** proposes that faculty space can play a pivotal role in enabling collaboration. The issue of cross-curricular collaboration, between Judaic and general studies, is explored for its pedagogical value (**Tapper and Weiss**) and its institutional value (**Feldman**). **Wall and Golbert** offer ways that schools can implant habits of teacher collaboration, and **Zakai and Appelbaum** draw lessons from a project that brought together day school Israel educators.

Finally, I'd like to draw attention to a host of new features in this Prizmah issue. Our designer has crafted a new look and feel, not a radical departure from past issues but one that takes account of Prizmah's brand and enhances the sense of new beginnings and innovation. We're pleased to introduce readers to the voice and vision of our CEO, **Paul Bernstein**. Be sure to read his words with the delightful cadence of his British accent in your ear! Our board chair, **Kathy Manning**, starts off our board column with a stirring combination of organizational vision and personal story. This issue inaugurates several new features: **Innovation Alley**, describing a school that is radically innovative and reflecting on what day schools might learn; **Commentary**, reactions by day school leaders to a notable quotation related to the issue theme, inspired by the Jewish textual tradition; **The Advice Booth**, with a Prizmah staffer answering a salient question concerning day school practice; and **On My Nightstand**, a collection of short book reviews and recommendations from Prizmah staff.

We wish our readers a shanah tovah umetukah—a sweet new year to Jewish day schools everywhere.

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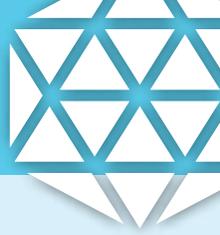
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Cover photo courtesy of the Pardes Institute for Jewish Studies.

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From the  
CEO



PAUL BERNSTEIN

# Building the Field of Jewish Day Schools Together

In the telling and retelling of the building of the Mishkan through the book of Shmot, there is much to learn about how Bnei Yisrael succeeded in this great endeavor, amidst so much detail about the architecture and contents. Hashem says that “every man whose heart makes him willing” is to be part of the work. Later, “Moshe called the whole community of the children of Israel to assemble” to convey the mitzvot, asking “every wise-hearted person among you [to] come and make everything that Hashem commanded.” The parsha emphasizes how every man and woman who was motivated came to help. And the entire community witnessed and supported their efforts.

The message of Bnei Yisrael’s vital building task in the wilderness is that they were stronger together. Building the Mishkan was not the work of a few individuals or a select group; neither do different tribes or other sections of the community separate from the common goal.

Today, our day schools lie at the heart of the Jewish community. To best serve them, five organizations each with a powerful legacy—PARDES, PEJE, RAVSAK, Schechter and YUSP—are coming together. Our goal in unifying through Prizmah is to provide the programs and services, knowledge and resources that enable communities and schools to thrive. We will aim to address their needs in governance and development, teaching and learning, leadership development and placement, 21st century learning, fieldwide data and research, and broader support.

Not only do we believe in the opportunity that comes through unity of these five organizations, but in the power of peer-to-peer learning among school leaders, addressing their common challenges together. The North American Jewish Day School Conference, taking place on February 5-7, 2017, in Chicago, is the largest day school gathering, a chance to learn with colleagues and peers. And throughout the year, Prizmah will provide the networking opportunities and convenings that aim to help school professional and lay leaders to find the answers to their burning questions, from colleagues right across the spectrum of Jewish day schools, with the help of the Prizmah team.

Prizmah’s focus is on achieving educational excellence and financial vitality among all Jewish day schools. The evidence points to the vital role of strong Jewish day schools in fostering a vibrant Jewish future. We will raise the profile and understanding of that impact among community leaders locally and nationally who can and should enable schools to succeed.

Prizmah’s goal is to understand and serve the individual needs of schools—meeting schools where they are, helping them reach the milestones that are right for them.

I feel honored to be able to serve in the founding team of Prizmah. I am the product of an amazing Jewish day school. Along with my family, I appreciate the way that my day school experience shaped my life. I am the proud parent of day school children and, like all of us, feel the power of Jewish day schools in my blood.

We are now at the start of a new chapter in strengthening Jewish day schools and the day school movement. I hope to connect with you at the North American Jewish Day School Conference, if not before, and encourage all to become members of Prizmah and get involved with us in shaping the future of Jewish education. We are stronger, together.

# My Story, Our Vision

I am delighted to be writing to you in this space as the founding board chair of Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools. It is my honor to share with you the vision and the values that guide our work, and my own story of how day schools have transformed me and my family.

Before that, though, I want to take a moment for hakarat hatov and thank each and every Prizmah staff member for the role they played in bringing us to this point. They have individually and collectively worked hard to build the five organizations that are combining to create Prizmah. Each of those organizations brought unique and important value to the Jewish day schools they served. If they had not done the hard work to build these important and effective institutions, we would not be here today.

A newly created Prizmah affords us the opportunity to change the landscape of Jewish day school education and, in my opinion, the landscape of the Jewish future. The work we are beginning here is not just for the Jewish day school families of today, but for future generations of students who will become the Jewish leaders of tomorrow.

We are working together to support strong, innovative, vibrant, outstanding Jewish day schools, and we are creating a model for the rest of the Jewish world—a model that many think is desperately needed. And we will do it with hard work, patience, creativity and new ways of thinking as we move forward together.

Our values are easily stated:

- 1) We strive for the best possible secular and Jewish education for our children by supporting excellence in all facets of our schools and our organization.
- 2) We embrace and support all streams of Jewish practice. We will create a multid denominational organization that serves all schools where they are.
- 3) We value working together and will reimagine what it means to be “one Jewish people.”
- 4) We are committed to helping to build a strong, vibrant future of educated Jews grounded in Jewish values who are ready to lead the world to a better tomorrow.

So why am I writing in this space today? Thirty years ago, I found myself in a situation I never expected. After growing up in the large Jewish community of Detroit, in a very assimilated family, I found myself living south of the Mason-Dixon line in Greensboro, North Carolina, with a Jewish population of 3,000 people. When it came time to send our first child to preschool, I discovered that all of the preschools were church schools, except for the preschool at B'nai Shalom Synagogue Day School. I decided that if I was going to send my child to a religious preschool, it might as well be my own religion, and we could move her into public school for kindergarten.

We grew to love B'nai Shalom and its faculty, and the values they taught our daughter. We were astonished that she became so comfortable with Judaism—with the holidays, the calendar, the rituals, and with Hebrew. But I continued to wonder what we might be giving up in her secular education

From the  
Board



**KATHY MANNING**

for all the time spent on the religious studies. And one day, my daughter Liz, who was probably seven years old at the time, looked up from the kitchen table when I walked in from a long day at work and said, “Mom, do you want to study Torah with me?” “Sure,” I said, and sat down at the table with her. It was then I realized that not only was she learning Torah, she was also learning to dissect and analyze language in a way that would serve her well in all her studies. At that moment, I got a glimpse into the brilliance of a Jewish day school education, and I must admit I was hooked.

Not surprisingly, we sent our younger two children to B'nai Shalom, and over time I chaired the board of directors twice, 10 years apart—once in a time of unprecedented growth, and later in a time of contraction. During my involvement at B'nai Shalom, I lived through a variety of problems that face so many day schools: problems recruiting great teachers, problems recruiting and retaining students, the need to work with families at different levels of observance and with different priorities, the growing need for scholarship funds, the need to strengthen math and science, the arts and sports offerings, the need to accommodate kids with special needs, the desire to make our kids fluent in Hebrew, issues of security, issues of governance, the growing need for volunteers in a diminishing pool, the desire for laptops and iPads, battles over hot lunches, and the never-ending demand for fundraising.

Through it all, I came to understand that the benefits far outweighed the challenges as I saw the results of our work: smart, confident, well-educated, treasured Jewish children who embraced and understood their Judaism and were proud to talk to their non-Jewish friends about what it means to be Jewish. Equally important, I have seen many of the kids we educated at our day school go on to take leadership roles in their Jewish communities when they went to college and in their new communities when they started their careers.

Nearly a year ago, I was invited to participate in a feasibility study for what was then known as NewOrg. At the end of the discussion, when I was asked whether I would be interested in being involved in the organization, I said no, I had “done day schools” as a day school lay leader. But then I read the business plan. I realized that what was envisioned was something much bigger than I had imagined: an organization that can strengthen and enhance day schools across the country and across the spectrum, to develop well-educated Jewish kids, knowledgeable and immersed in Jewish values, and prepared to be leaders in all different facets of our Jewish community. By harnessing the power and knowledge and experience of the five legacy organizations, across all denominations, we can create something truly unique and exemplary.

I was inspired, and I decided that I wanted to be a part of this transformation. And the more I delve into this, the more I learn, the more people I talk with, the more challenges and opportunities I see, the more excited I am. I hope you are too.

With best wishes of success for all of us,

Kathy E. Manning

# Prizmah: Where We Are and How We Got Here

כל העולם כולו גֶּשֶׁר צָר מְאֹד וְהַעֲקָר לֹא לִפְחַד כָּלֵל.

*All the world is a narrow bridge, and the most important thing is not to fear at all.*

Something amazing happened this summer: five of North America's leading Jewish day school organizations and networks, seeing an opportunity to strengthen day schools and the field, came together to form Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools. Mergers are no longer rare in the nonprofit sector—my colleagues at La Piana Consulting and I have worked with hundreds of organizations over the last 18 years, and watched many more processes unfold from afar—but for me, this merger was particularly inspiring. Five entities working in a field where merger has *not* been particularly common, each dedicated to serving schools with a different approach to Judaism and to education, devoted untold hours to an incredibly thoughtful, thorough process of looking at how, precisely, they might be stronger together. From the outset it was clear that one plus one could not equal two; the dream was bigger than that. One plus one had to equal much more than three... and the benefits had to be clear and compelling for schools, families and the field as a whole. The vision was for more than a merger—a startup *built* on a merger that would lead the field to a new level of success.

Processes like this, combining exploration, negotiation, strategy formation and business planning, are complex, and they demand much of the organizational leaders.

**Mission-first orientation.** This may sound obvious and even easy, but in reality, putting aside one's personal investment in an organization—*crossing that narrow bridge*—can be incredibly difficult. Many of the lay and professional leaders that came together in this process had been with their organization or network since its founding or soon thereafter. They had deep and rich relationships with the schools they served, and a profound commitment to what they had built together. Letting go of that is difficult regardless of how strong the rationale for consolidation may be.

**Investment.** The lay and professional leaders of PARDES, PEJE, RAVSAK, Schechter and YUSP invested hundreds of hours in discussion, learning and analysis over the course of more than a year. The AVI CHAI Foundation was an important thought partner, and stepped in to provide financial support for the cost of the process, as well for the organizations themselves, as much of their routine fundraising was put on hold pending a decision on if and how to join forces. The collective investment was significant but necessary to ensure an outcome that was both mission-enhancing and financially prudent.

**Willingness to work through cultural differences.** *You say tomay-to, I say tomah-to.* Every organization has its own unique organizational culture, and cultural differences manifest in every

stage of a negotiation and planning process such as this—and then become even more salient once organizational integration begins. Cultural integration is critical to long-term success, and this group was able to acknowledge their differences from early on, laying the groundwork for the thoughtful integration process that continues to this day.

**Patience.** Negotiation and planning can be time-consuming, and there are always those who would like to move more quickly. This is particularly true once the decision is made, when each board of directors votes to move forward with the agreed-upon course of action. At that point, full steam ahead—right? Unfortunately it isn't always that simple, particularly when the integration involves organizations incorporated in different states, and every state has its own specific legal requirements before this type of integration can be finalized. So, while the five organizations have begun collaborating more closely, developing and delivering programs under the Prizmah banner, the founding partners must conclude a series of legal steps required by Massachusetts and New York.

The transfer of YUSP and PARDES programs and staff to Prizmah was simple; all are based in New York, and this type of transfer did not require approval beyond the directors of each organization. To fully transfer all of PEJE to Prizmah requires the approval of the Massachusetts Attorney General (AG). And, to fully merge the staff and programs of RAVSAK and Schechter, organizations incorporated in New York, requires approval from the New York AG and the New York State Department of Education. Each of these processes is well under way and nearing conclusion. But as anyone who has engaged with the bureaucracy of state government can attest, it takes time. And still, Prizmah has begun to carry forward the work of all five in a more integrated fashion, with schools beginning to reap the benefits of the commitment and hard work of all involved.

It has been a long road, to be sure, and much work remains to fully realize the powerful vision put forth by Prizmah's founders. Nevertheless, so much has been accomplished already. Prizmah currently has 35 employees and represents over 375 schools with close to 100,000 students. The future looks incredibly bright, and it will be a true pleasure to watch it unfold.

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MARK **KRAMER**

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# Collective Impact

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## What It Takes to Make Large-Scale Progress

*Below is an edited version of an article that first appeared in the Winter 2011 issue of Stanford Social Innovation Review. The full version can be found at [www.ssir.org](http://www.ssir.org).*

The article republished here is a classic study in the field of collaboration. The authors argue that current practices in philanthropy and the social innovation sector are not capable of reaching the larger challenges confronting American society. They advocate for a different approach, called collective impact, that starts with a large swath of stakeholders and institutions agreeing to work upon a common agenda in order to tackle in concert large-scale issues, such as the shortfalls of the American educational system.

The launch of Prizmah represents an opportunity for the field of Jewish day schools to think big, to work together to confront large, systemwide challenges. After you read this article, we invite you to tell us: What are the major issues confronting the day school field, Jewish education or the Jewish people as a whole, that might be addressed by a “collective impact”-sized initiative? What organizations, funders and agencies might be brought together to address these issues and achieve breakthroughs where previous efforts foundered or remained isolated, local? We call upon our readers to help set the agenda that will elevate Jewish education to higher levels in the coming decades and strengthen day schools in their capacity to fulfill their mission. To post a response, go to [Facebook.com/PrizmahCJDS](https://Facebook.com/PrizmahCJDS).

The scale and complexity of the US public education system has thwarted attempted reforms for decades. Major funders, such as the Annenberg Foundation, Ford Foundation and Pew Charitable Trusts, have abandoned many of their efforts in frustration after acknowledging their lack of progress.

Against these daunting odds, a remarkable exception seems to be emerging in Cincinnati. Strive, a nonprofit subsidiary of KnowledgeWorks, has brought together local leaders to tackle the student achievement crisis and improve education throughout greater Cincinnati and northern Kentucky. In the four years since the group was launched, Strive partners have improved student success in dozens of key areas across three large public school districts. Despite the recession and budget cuts, 34 of the 53 success indicators that Strive tracks have shown positive trends, including high school graduation rates, fourth-grade reading and math scores, and the number of preschool children prepared for kindergarten.

Why has Strive made progress when so many other efforts have failed? It is because a core group of community leaders decided to abandon their individual agendas in favor of a collective approach to improving student achievement. More than 300 leaders of local organizations agreed to participate, including the heads of influential private and corporate foundations, city government officials, school district representatives, the presidents of eight universities and community colleges, and the executive directors of hundreds of education-related nonprofit and advocacy groups.

These leaders realized that fixing one point on the educational continuum—such as better after-school programs—wouldn't make much difference unless all parts of the continuum improved at the same time. No single organization, however innovative or powerful, could accomplish this alone. Instead, their ambitious mission became to coordinate improvements at every stage of a young person's life, from "cradle to career."

Strive didn't try to create a new educational program or attempt to convince donors to spend more money. Instead, through a carefully structured process, Strive focused the entire educational community on a single set of goals, measured in the same way. Participating organizations are grouped into 15 different Student Success Networks (SSNs) by type of activity, such as early childhood education or tutoring. Each SSN has been meeting with coaches and facilitators for two hours every two weeks for the past three years, developing shared performance indicators, discussing their progress, and most important, learning from each other and aligning their efforts to support each other.

Strive, both the organization and the process it helps facilitate, is an example of collective impact, the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Collaboration is nothing new. The social sector is filled with examples of partnerships, networks and other types of joint efforts. But collective impact initiatives are distinctly different. Unlike most collaborations, collective impact initiatives involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants.

Large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations. Evidence of the effectiveness of this approach is still limited, but these examples suggest that substantially greater progress could be made in alleviating many of our most serious and complex social problems if nonprofits, governments, businesses, and the public were brought together around a common agenda to create collective impact. It doesn't happen often, not because it is impossible, but because it is so rarely attempted. Funders and nonprofits alike overlook the potential for collective impact because they are used to focusing on independent action as the primary vehicle for social change.

## Isolated Impact

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Most funders, faced with the task of choosing a few grantees from many applicants, try to ascertain which organizations make the greatest contribution toward solving a social problem. Grantees, in turn, compete to be chosen by emphasizing how their individual activities produce the greatest effect. Each organization is judged on its own potential to achieve impact, independent of the numerous other organizations that may also influence the issue. And when a grantee is asked to evaluate the impact of its work, every attempt is made to isolate that grantee's individual influence from all other variables.

In short, the nonprofit sector most frequently operates using an approach that we call isolated impact. It is an approach oriented toward finding and funding a solution embodied within a single organization, combined with the hope that the most effective organizations will grow or replicate to extend their impact more widely. Funders search for more effective interventions as if there were a cure for failing schools that only needs to be discovered, in the way that medical cures are discovered in laboratories. As a result of this process, nearly 1.4 million nonprofits try to invent independent solutions to major social problems, often working at odds with each other and exponentially increasing the perceived resources required to make meaningful progress. Recent trends have only reinforced this perspective. The growing interest in venture philanthropy and social entrepreneurship, for example, has greatly benefited the social sector by identifying and accelerating the growth of many high-performing nonprofits, yet it has also accentuated an emphasis on scaling up a few select organizations as the key to social progress.

Despite the dominance of this approach, there is scant evidence that isolated initiatives are the best way to solve many social problems in today's complex and interdependent world. No single organization is responsible for any major social problem, nor can any single organization cure it. In the field of education, even the most highly respected nonprofits have taken decades to reach tens of thousands of children, a remarkable achievement that deserves praise, but one that is three orders of magnitude short of the tens of millions of US children that need help.

Shifting from isolated impact to collective impact is not merely a matter of encouraging more collaboration. It requires a systemic approach to social impact that focuses on the relationships between organizations and the progress toward shared objectives. And it requires the creation of a new set of nonprofit management organizations that have the skills and resources to assemble and coordinate the specific elements necessary for collective action to succeed.

## The Five Conditions of Collective Success

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Our research shows that successful collective impact initiatives typically have five conditions that together produce true alignment and lead to powerful results: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and backbone support organizations.

### Common Agenda

Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed-upon actions. Take a close look at any group of funders and nonprofits that believe they are working on the same social issue, and you quickly find that it is often not the same issue at all. Each organization often has a slightly different definition of the problem and the ultimate goal. These differences are easily ignored when organizations work independently on isolated initiatives, yet these differences splinter the efforts and undermine the impact of the field as a whole. Collective impact requires that these differences be discussed and resolved. Every participant

need not agree with every other participant on all dimensions of the problem. In fact, disagreements continue to divide participants in all of our examples of collective impact. However, all participants must agree on the primary goals for the collective impact initiative as a whole.

Funders can play an important role in getting organizations to act in concert. In the case of Strive, rather than fueling hundreds of strategies and nonprofits, many funders have aligned to support Strive's central goals. The Greater Cincinnati Foundation realigned its education goals to be more compatible with Strive, adopting Strive's annual report card as the foundation's own measures for progress in education. Every time an organization applied to Duke Energy for a grant, Duke asked, "Are you part of the [Strive] network?" And when a new funder, the Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile Jr./US Bank Foundation, expressed interest in education, they were encouraged by virtually every major education leader in Cincinnati to join Strive if they wanted to have an impact in local education.

## Shared Measurement Systems

Developing a shared measurement system is essential to collective impact. Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported. Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations not only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, it also enables the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures.

It may seem impossible to evaluate hundreds of different organizations on the same set of measures. Yet recent advances in web-based technologies have enabled common systems for reporting performance and measuring outcomes. These systems increase efficiency and reduce cost. They can also improve the quality and credibility of the data collected, increase effectiveness by enabling grantees to learn from each other's performance, and document the progress of the field as a whole.

## Mutually Reinforcing Activities

Collective impact initiatives depend on a diverse group of stakeholders working together, not by requiring that all participants do the same thing, but by encouraging each participant to undertake the specific set of activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others.

The power of collective action comes not from the sheer number of participants or the uniformity of their efforts, but from the coordination of their differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action. Each stakeholder's efforts must fit into an overarching plan if their combined efforts are to succeed. The multiple causes of social problems, and the components of their solutions, are interdependent. They cannot be addressed by uncoordinated actions among isolated organizations.

The 15 SSNs in Strive each undertake different types of activities at different stages of the educational continuum. Strive does not prescribe what practices each of the 300 participating organizations should pursue. Each organization and network is free to chart its own course consistent with the common agenda, and informed by the shared measurement of results.

## Continuous Communication

Developing trust among nonprofits, corporations and government agencies is a monumental challenge. Participants need several years of regular meetings to build up enough experience with each other to recognize and appreciate the common motivation behind their different efforts. They need time to see that their own interests will be treated fairly, and that decisions will be made on the basis of objective evidence and the best possible solution to the problem, not to favor the priorities of one organization over another.

Even the process of creating a common vocabulary takes time, and it is an essential prerequisite to developing shared measurement systems. All the collective impact initiatives we have studied held monthly or even biweekly in-person meetings among the organizations' CEO-level leaders. Skipping meetings or sending lower-level delegates was not acceptable.

Most of the meetings were supported by external facilitators and followed a structured agenda.

The Strive networks, for example, have been meeting regularly for more than three years. Communication happens between meetings, too: Strive uses web-based tools, such as Google Groups, to keep communication flowing among and within the networks. At first, many of the leaders showed up because they hoped that their participation would bring their organizations additional funding, but they soon learned that was not the meetings' purpose. What they discovered instead were the rewards of learning and solving problems together with others who shared their same deep knowledge and passion about the issue.

## Backbone Support Organizations

Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. Coordination takes time, and none of the participating organizations has any to spare. The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails.

The backbone organization requires a dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations who can plan, manage and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly. Strive has simplified the initial staffing requirements for a backbone organization to three roles: project manager, data manager and facilitator.

Collective impact also requires a highly structured process that leads to effective decision making. In the case of Strive, staff worked with General Electric (GE) to adapt for the social sector the Six Sigma process that GE uses for its own continuous quality improvement. The Strive Six Sigma process includes training, tools and resources that each SSN uses to define its common agenda, shared measures and plan of action, supported by Strive facilitators to guide the process.

In the best of circumstances, these backbone organizations embody the principles of adaptive leadership: the ability to focus people's attention and create a sense of urgency, the skill to apply pressure to stakeholders without overwhelming them, the competence to frame issues in a way that presents opportunities as well as difficulties, and the strength to mediate conflict among stakeholders.

## Funding Collective Impact

Creating a successful collective impact initiative requires a significant financial investment: the time participating organizations must dedicate to the work, the development and monitoring of shared measurement systems, and the staff of the backbone organization needed to lead and support the initiative's ongoing work.

As successful as Strive has been, it has struggled to raise money, confronting funders' reluctance to pay for infrastructure and preference for short-term solutions. Collective impact requires instead that funders support a long-term process of social change without identifying any particular solution in advance. They must be willing to let grantees steer the work and have the patience to stay with an initiative for years, recognizing that social change can come from the gradual improvement of an entire system over time, not just from a single breakthrough by an individual organization.

This requires a fundamental change in how funders see their role, from funding organizations to leading a long-term process of social change. It is no longer enough to fund an innovative solution created by a single nonprofit or to build that organization's capacity. Instead, funders must help create and sustain the collective processes, measurement reporting systems, and community leadership that enable cross-sector coalitions to arise and thrive.

The most powerful role for funders to play in addressing adaptive problems is to focus attention on the issue and help to create a process that mobilizes



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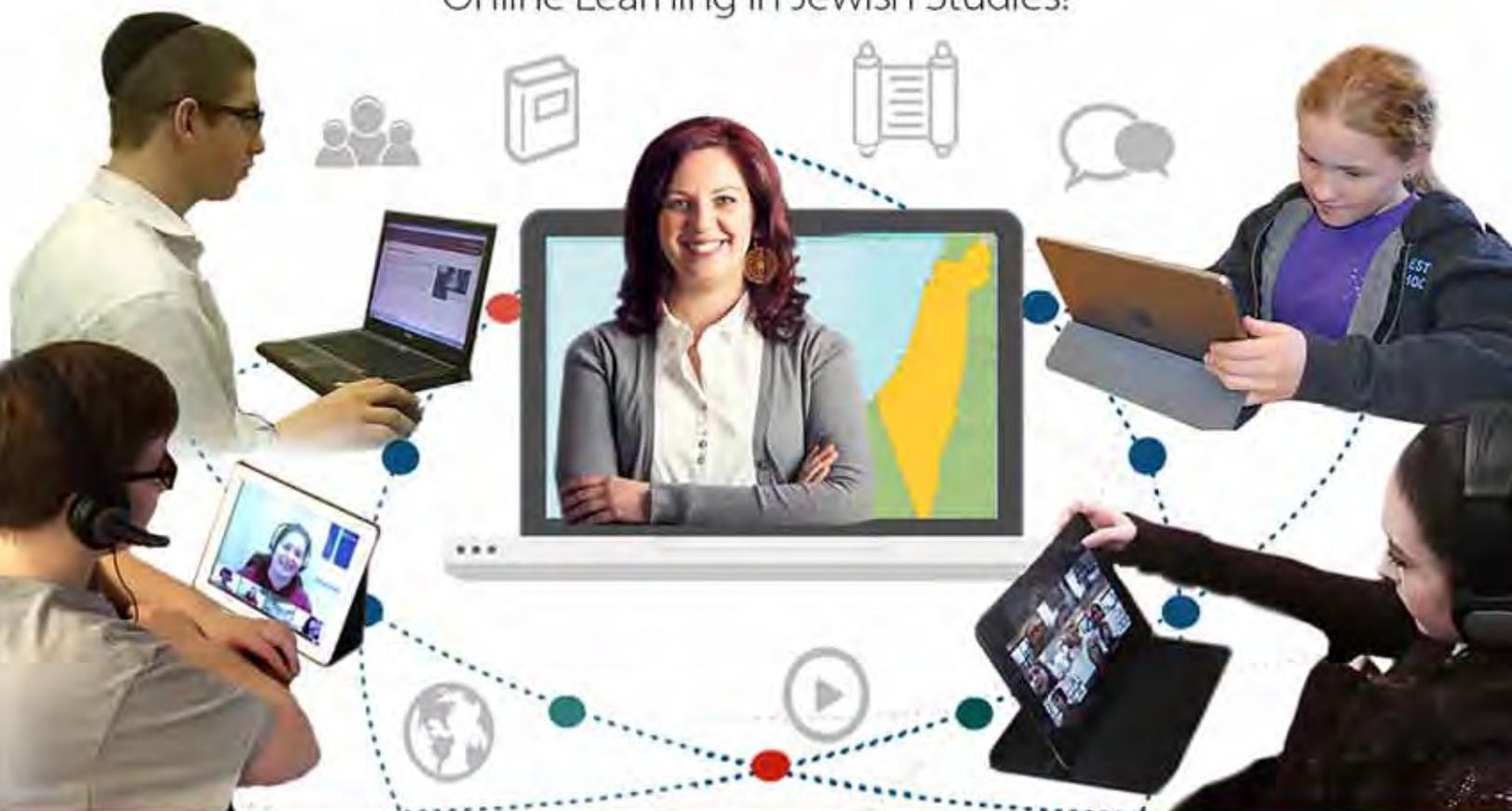
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We salute Prizmah's collaborative efforts on behalf of  
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the organizations involved to find a solution themselves. Mobilizing and coordinating stakeholders is far messier and slower work than funding a compelling grant request from a single organization. However, systemic change ultimately depends on a sustained campaign to increase the capacity and coordination of an entire field. Funders who want to create large-scale change follow four practices: take responsibility for assembling the elements of a solution; create a movement for change; include solutions from outside the nonprofit sector; and use actionable knowledge to influence behavior and improve performance.

These same four principles are embodied in collective impact initiatives. The organizers of Strive abandoned the conventional approach of funding specific programs at education nonprofits and took responsibility for advancing education reform themselves. They built a movement, engaging hundreds of organizations in a drive toward shared goals. They used tools outside the nonprofit sector, adapting GE's Six Sigma planning process for the social sector. And through the community report card and the biweekly meetings of the SSNs, they created actionable knowledge that motivated the community and improved performance among the participants.

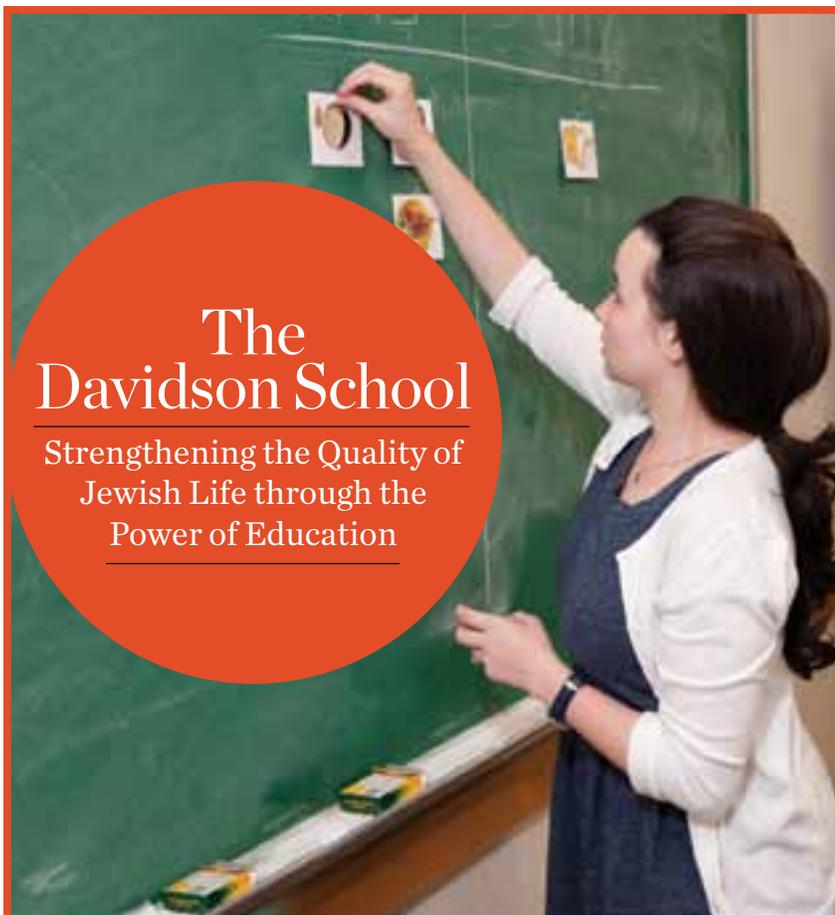
Funding collective impact initiatives costs money, but it can be a highly leveraged investment. A backbone organization with a modest annual budget can support a collective impact initiative of several hundred organizations, magnifying the impact of millions or even billions of dollars in existing funding. Strive, for example, has a \$1.5 million annual budget but is coordinating the efforts and increasing the effectiveness of organizations with combined budgets of \$7 billion. The social sector, however, has not yet changed its funding practices to enable the shift to collective impact. Until funders are willing to embrace this new approach and invest sufficient resources in the necessary facilitation, coordination and measurement that enable organizations to work in concert, the requisite infrastructure will not evolve.

## Future Shock

What might social change look like if funders, nonprofits, government officials, civic leaders and business executives embraced collective impact? Recent events at Strive provide an exciting indication of what might be possible.

Strive has begun to codify what it has learned so that other communities can achieve collective impact more rapidly. The organization is working with nine other communities to establish similar cradle-to-career initiatives. Importantly, although Strive is broadening its impact to a national level, the organization is not scaling up its own operations by opening branches in other cities. Instead, Strive is promulgating a flexible process for change, offering each community a set of tools for collective impact, drawn from Strive's experience but adaptable to the community's own needs and resources. As a result, the new communities take true ownership of their own collective impact initiatives, but they don't need to start the process from scratch. Activities such as developing a collective educational reform mission and vision or creating specific community-level educational indicators are expedited through the use of Strive materials and assistance from Strive staff. Processes that took Strive several years to develop are being adapted and modified by other communities in significantly less time.

This exciting evolution of the Strive collective impact initiative is far removed from the isolated impact approach that now dominates the social sector and that inhibits any major effort at comprehensive, large-scale change. If successful, it presages the spread of a new approach that will enable us to solve today's most serious social problems with the resources we already have at our disposal. It would be a shock to the system. But it's a form of shock therapy that's badly needed.



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# Achieving Citywide Strength

in Jewish Day School Education

Chicago's Jewish day schools thrive due to the power of collaboration: among schools; among local funders; between federation, schools and funders; and between local and national funders.



Pictures from a Chicago training run by the Jewish New Teacher Project.



At Crown Family Philanthropies, we implemented a strategy of strengthening day schools in the city of Chicago through partnership and collaboration. It is a strategy that honors each school's unique needs by providing targeted support to individual schools, while also emphasizing city-wide supports. All of our funding efforts are informed by close dialogue with educators to ensure we provide resources that schools genuinely want and find beneficial. Deep partnerships with peer funders both locally and nationally enable us to leverage the wisdom and best practices of those who share our vision for strong, vibrant day schools.

Two priorities guide our efforts: training and supporting strong educators, and building organizational capacity and financial sustainability.

## Training and Supporting Strong Educators

**Investments in training and professional development**, both for aspiring future teachers and seasoned educators, ensure that day school educators are equipped to provide the strongest educational experiences. This includes support for programs like the Pardes Educators Program and the Jewish New Teacher Project, which provide those entering the field with both strong preparatory training, as well as ongoing support to help them thrive once they are in the classroom. Programs like the Harvard Principals Center train established leaders in the field, helping them grow their skillsets and continue to deepen their knowledge base. Before bringing any such program to Chicago, we work closely with local leadership to ensure the initiative is a fit for the specific needs of our community. Close dialogue and partnership with funders who have invested in the programs is critical in ensuring that our funding builds on lessons learned, thus continuing to deepen impact.

## Building Organizational Capacity and Financial Sustainability

Our schools provide outstanding educational experiences, while teaching Chicago's children strength of character, resilience and commitment to the Jewish future. Yet none of this can be achieved without financial sustainability and strong operations. The Foundation has invested in supports to help Chicago schools as a whole achieve financial and operational strength.

**Contextualized data** helps schools make informed decisions. Working with a local funding partner, we supported YU University-School Partnership (now part of Prizmah) to work with local schools to obtain an operational baseline. Schools were paired with coaches to support individualized needs.

At the same time, shared data enabled efficient deployment of resources to help schools facing similar needs. Schools were able to strengthen their operations and work together for shared gains.

**Increasing the number of children who choose day school** means more children benefit from the rich learning experience that day school provides. The entire community is strengthened, as we know that many day school graduates go on to take on meaningful leadership roles, both lay and professional. From a financial perspective, increasing the number of children who choose day school improves operating efficiencies, allowing fixed costs to be distributed over a larger number of students and often only marginally increasing variable costs. In a classroom with capacity for 17 students and 15 students enrolled, adding two additional students provides added revenue, with minimal added cost.

This means that **recruitment** is very important both from a mission perspective and from an operations perspective. By working together, Chicago's day schools are transforming recruitment from a zero-sum game to a collaborative effort. With local funding partners, we supported PEJE (now part of Prizmah) to conduct market research assessing the growth potential for enrollment in local non-Orthodox day schools, and identifying targeted market segments with potential for growth as well as the priorities most important to those segments. Chicago's non-Orthodox schools are working together to reach these families with resonant messages that emphasize issues ranked as extremely important to parents, such as secular academics.

**Increasing collaboration between day schools and early childhood programs** is an important piece of recruitment. The Chicago market research identified JCC preschool families and PJ Library subscribers as populations with greater openness to day school than the Jewish community at large. In Chicago, we are beginning to think about how the connective tissue between these segments of the Jewish educational landscape can be strengthened, so that more handoffs are made from Jewish early childhood programming to day school.

To reach financial sustainability, it is imperative to **grow the landscape of funders** who are committed to day school. We were energized by the AVI CHAI Foundation's success in recruiting new donors through the Day School Match program. We partnered with AVI CHAI to bring this program to Chicago. After listening closely to local educators, we worked together to adapt the program to reflect the needs of the local landscape.

We are proud of what Chicago has achieved through partnership and collaboration. Working holistically across schools has the power to elevate each school, creating synergistic gains across the system.



**DAN PERLA**

*Director, Financial Vitality,  
Prizmah*

# How Much to Charge

## Q: What is best practice when it comes to setting tuition?

A: In his book *Mind The Gap*, Richard Soghoian, head of school at Columbia Grammar and Prep, argues that private school tuition should be set at the actual cost to educate a single child and should exclude both scholarship and capital costs. Scholarship and capital dollars should be raised independently and not tied to tuition. In other words, neither scholarship nor capital costs should be considered operating expenses and should therefore not be included in gross tuition. I am not a CPA but I believe that accountants consider scholarship an offset to revenue and not an actual expense. Simply put, schools should charge a full or gross tuition that reflects the actual cost to educate a child, exclusive of scholarship, capital and other one-time expenses.

I estimate that no more than one-third of Jewish day schools engage in this best practice. Approximately one-third charge a full tuition that includes some level of scholarship expense. While the actual percentage of tuition going toward scholarship may still be relatively small, many parents erroneously believe their tuition levels are so high because they are subsidizing scholarship families. This fuels parental discontent. Where schools charge a full tuition that includes some level of scholarship, they should disclose this in an annual report and on their website.

Equally surprising, at approximately one-third of Jewish day schools, the full tuition charge is below the actual cost to educate a student. These schools are subsidizing every student, including those whose families could comfortably afford to

pay more. Many smaller schools engage in such a practice due principally to their fear that a meaningful increase in tuition will cause existing full-pay families to leave the school. There is scant evidence to support such a claim. Measuring Success has performed thousands of parent surveys at more than 100 Jewish day schools and has found that tuition changes, whether up or down, have no discernible impact on enrollment.

## Q: What about alternative tuition programs? Are they succeeding in boosting day enrollment?

A: Alternative tuition programs are being widely embraced by the Jewish day school field. More than one-third have adopted some type of alternative tuition program. These include indexed or flexible tuition, income cap programs (iCap), and multitiered tuition programs. Some claim to have stabilized retention and/or boosted enrollment. Over the next few months, Prizmah plans to analyze these programs carefully in order to better understand their objectives and test their efficacy. We know that the contextual factors that impact schools and communities must be taken into account before adopting a "one size fits all" approach to tuition. Once we have analyzed the data from these alternative programs and the unique contexts under which they operate, we will share our findings with the field and will publicize approaches that appear to be working.

**Have a question about day schools?  
Submit it to [advice@prizmah.org](mailto:advice@prizmah.org).**

# Partnerships

## for a Robust Jewish Identity

Many organizations think they alone hold the key to help children develop a strong Jewish identity. However, all Jewish educational and religious institutions will invariably be more effective if they collaborate with other organizations. This is certainly true of day schools. They will magnify and maximize their effectiveness to the extent they partner with institutions that share their Jewish mission.

Day schools sit at the center of a thriving ecosystem of valuable Jewish organizations, with the latter—Jewish summer camps, the home, youth groups, campus Hillels, UJA and Israel—surrounding and enveloping the school. “Spokes” of influence connect the day school hub to each organization, in a bidirectional symbiotic relationship (and as the graphic shows, each institution on the periphery impacts one another as well).

Here are three examples of the potential that Jewish organizations possess to reinforce and complement a day school education and build a more robust Jewish identity for our children.

### Jewish Overnight Summer Camps

Children learn things in a Jewish day school that they will not learn any place else. Yet, it is generally at Jewish overnight camp—typically not at school—where kids learn Israeli dancing, Israeli folk and modern songs, and Shabbat zemirot. In camp, children learn Hebrew so naturally that they may not know the direct translation of certain Hebrew terms, but they certainly know that

they should go to the *chadar ochel* or *mirpa'ah* or *tsrif* when they are hungry, sick or tired. Camps also make Jewish living plausible by providing a community where Jews are living Jewishly. The self-contained structure organized entirely by Jewish considerations enables each camper to feel comfortable immersing him- or herself in an intensive Jewish experience.

At camp, children experience Shabbat in a rarified way that is free from the distractions of shopping malls, technology and dance recitals. For some campers, the summer may be the only time they observe Shabbat for 25 hours. It may be the only time they experience the rituals and restrictions of Shabbat creating a novel sacred space that connects them to God and Jewish tradition and deepens their bonds with their friends. The more students we can encourage to go to Jewish summer camp, the more our schools will be enriched. Imagine how much more ruach there would be on school-sponsored shabbatonim if more of our students were to attend Jewish summer camp. Imagine how content-rich camps would be if more of our students were to attend Jewish summer camping instead of other summer camps.

In Toronto, the UJA has established the Ontario Council for Jewish camping. The directors of all the Jewish camps sit on that committee. Once a year, they hold one of their monthly meetings at TanenbaumCHAT. We use it as an opportunity to brainstorm ways camps can recruit more day school students and ways day school representatives can pitch Jewish day school education to campers. In an ideal world, camp offices would be housed in the school so that parents in both domains—camp and school—could be enticed to send their children to Jewish day school during the year and Jewish overnight camp in the summer.

### Synagogues

Nearly every day school holds some type of tefillah, and it is there that students learn the weekday service. It is there that they take on leadership roles in a community of friends. However, it is in the synagogue where children connect not just to peers their own age but also to children and adults of all ages. They experience the religious elements of our tradition as part of the Jewish community in its totality.

In school, students may learn parashat hashavua; only in the synagogue do they experience the weekly Torah reading. In school, they may learn about the High Holiday service and memorize the names of the sections of the Rosh Hashanah Musaf service: Malchuyot, Zichronot and Shofarot. It is in the synagogue that they hear the shofar blown. In school, students may learn the Jewish lifecycle and the Jewish calendar; but in the synagogue, they can experience how a community authentically lives these events and holidays. Finally, children graduate day school; hopefully, they do not outgrow their synagogue and will maintain a relationship with their rabbi as they mature, marry, celebrate and mourn.

Much of what students are being educated toward happens in a synagogue. The question is, how do we strengthen the partnership between school and shul, particularly when many day school students feel that they “do Jewish enough” during the week? At TanenbaumCHAT, we have been modestly successful. Some synagogues have designated one Shabbat a year as TanenbaumCHAT Shabbat when our students participate in the service. We have tried to heighten the presence of congregational rabbis in the school by hosting an annual Board of Rabbis meeting, by inviting congregational rabbis to give divrei Torah on Fridays, and by leading monthly or quarterly lunch-and-learns. In another Jewish day high school, students had not only a community service requirement but also a commensurate synagogue service requirement. Ideally, students see their congregational rabbis regularly in school and rabbis see their day school students regularly in shul. Synagogue life is indispensable to a robust Jewish identity.

## Home

Day schools teach texts, rituals, the lifecycle, chaggim, Jewish history, Ivrit and more. Day schools hold the responsibility of teaching Jewish “material.” Parents teach that the material matters...or does not matter.

The 20th century British philosopher Bertrand Russell makes the distinction between “knowledge by description” and “knowledge by acquaintance.” A day school education primarily falls into the former category. In the classroom, we teach about Passover and other chaggim, about Shabbat and all its accompanying rituals. We teach about kashrut. Students learn how and why to perform and celebrate these practices.

However, it is in the home where the seder takes place. It is in the home where Kiddush is recited. It is in the kitchen where the fundamentals of kashrut are lived and conscious eating decisions are made with regularity. When parents have a Pesach seder, it takes whatever the students learned in school about Pesach and makes it relevant. When parents have Shabbat dinner and

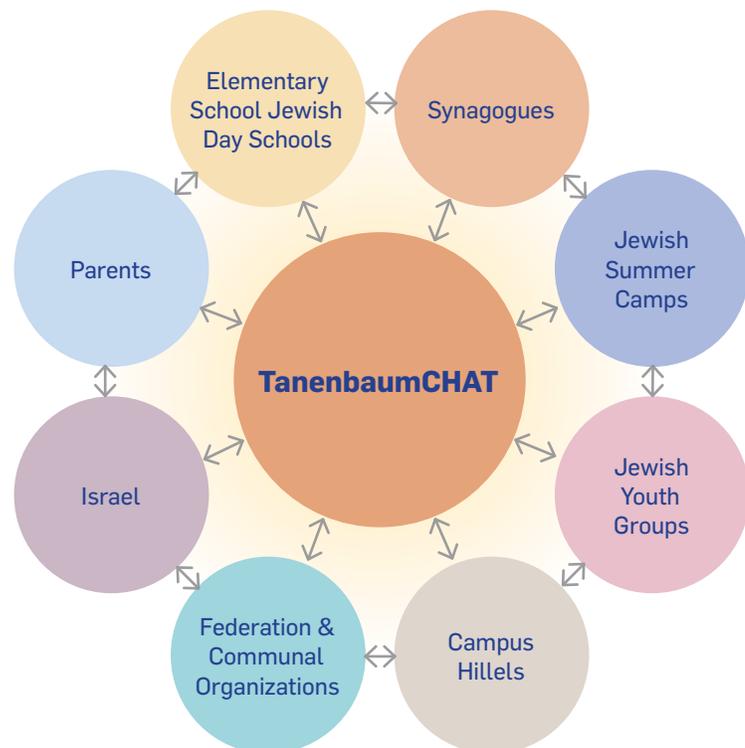
recite Kiddush, they convey that the skills and lessons taught at school about Shabbat are real. They have practical authentic value. Building a bridge between school and home is vital.

In elementary day schools, it is fairly easy to bring parents into the educational orbit of the school. Parents want to see their children grow, develop and demonstrate what they have learned; and for children, the feeling is mutual. In a high school, it is much more difficult to involve parents. Teens do not want to see their parents in school. Parents enjoy sending off their teenager in the morning and sharing the burden of raising an adolescent with someone else. All this is reinforced by the fact that many administrators prefer that parents simply stay out of the way and leave education to the professionals. However, unless we figure out a way to co-opt parents or partner with them, it is not clear how much “stickiness,” to use authors Chip and Dan Heath’s term, there will be to all that we try to teach. Unless we move from knowledge by description, which is acquired in the school, to knowledge by acquaintance, which is acquired in the home, it is uncertain how much students will retain after the test.

TanenbaumCHAT is piloting a program to involve parents in their teenage child’s Jewish education. Ninth-grade families who are new to the school (who do not have an older sibling already enrolled) are offered a \$5,000 discount on their tenth-grade tuition if the parents agree to spend a year studying with our Jewish studies teachers. Parents commit to attending 24 90-minute weekly evening sessions where they study Tanakh, rabbinics, ethics and Jewish history. In addition, they are required to bring their child to two Sunday yemei iyyun (study days), one prior to Chanukkah and one prior to Pesach. By teaching the parents portions of their child’s Jewish studies curriculum, we hope to increase the number and quality of Jewish conversations that take place in the home by bridging the classroom and the dinner table.

Above are three examples of the many types of partnerships that will help schools advance their Jewish mission. The more we immerse our children in Jewish learning and Jewish living and encourage their participation in other Jewish institutions, the greater the chances we will see positive Jewish outcomes. Our children will be stronger Jews, and the Jewish people will have a more secure future.

## Partners that Maximize the Impact of Jewish Education



# The Quest for Teaching Excellence

Through Communitywide Collaboration

This article highlights five lessons for those who seek to develop communitywide collaborations to support day school professional development. The New Jersey Quest for Teaching Excellence Program was founded in 2011 in the belief that excellent teachers are needed to build excellent schools and that teacher excellence is best cultivated through communitywide collaboration. Each of four partner schools was tasked with establishing its own robust professional development plan driven by the individualized needs of teachers and overseen by a part-time faculty dean. These efforts were enhanced through ongoing interschool collaboration that enabled teachers and administrators to work with a more diverse range of colleagues than would be found in any individual school. The program sought to strengthen teachers and schools while making efficient use of the local community's financial and human resources.

Quest is an alliance of four New Jersey day schools with diverse organizational structures, denominational affiliations and educational approaches. The program is administered by the local Federation, which provides an educational consultant to help schools establish professional development goals and processes, facilitate deans meetings, oversee ongoing collaborative learning opportunities, and organize program preparation for the biannual conference. In addition to monies provided by the schools and the Federation, local philanthropists provide a significant amount of funding to support the program.

Central to the program is an interest in fostering efficient communitywide collaboration and the knowledge that effective professional development is context-specific and driven by the personal needs of schools and teachers. The part-time faculty dean at each school plays an important role in balancing these principles. Each dean directs a school-based professional development initiative that responds to the individualized needs of teachers. Deans meet regularly to share best practices, co-plan all-schools events, collaborate on smaller learning workshops, promote teacher visitation among the schools and plan communitywide professional development conferences.

Program success was evaluated on an ongoing basis through an annual census documenting each school's professional development program, feedback surveys completed by participants after each collaborative activity, and ongoing conversation with schools heads and faculty deans. After five years, schools have refined their processes for monitoring, creating and evaluating professional development activities. This has led them to be more intentional in choosing professional development topics and formats that meet the goals of their teachers and programs while aligning their approaches with current research.

School reflections depict a cultural shift regarding professional development. Rather than equating professional development programs with one-time workshops, deans and teachers seek more extensive learning opportunities. Teachers select professional development opportunities based on overarching personal goals; they expect workshops and conferences both to benefit their own professional growth and to give them ideas they can share with colleagues. This has resulted in increased collegiality and greater investment on the part of teachers.

In addition, this collaboration has united local day school professionals and supporters more cohesively than ever before. There has been an increase in the number of ongoing collaborative programs across denominational and professional affiliations, and communal leaders continually reaffirm commitment to excellence in day school education.

## Collaboration is Sharing Both the Tangible and Intangible

Many collaborative alliances come together out of a need to share limited resources. Quest is no different. It was created at a time when resources in the community, and in the economy as a whole, were decreasing. Schools were incentivized by a family foundation and a communal day school fund to work together to make the most out of communal funding. To this day, a significant driver is an interest in an efficient and effective use of communal and donor funds. The program could not continue without significant annual funding from communal sources as well as from the schools themselves.

While tangible benefits are often an initial draw, collaborative alliances are strengthened when they share more than material goods. Beyond shared resources, Quest schools are brought together by shared vision and shared experiences. Program coordinators, deans and school heads shape the program based on a shared vision of professional development, using teacher feedback to ground themselves in the lived experiences of their

faculties. Shared experiences take place at collaborative workshops, cross-school visitations and bi-annual communitywide conferences. It is through these elements that participants develop collegial connections across organizational barriers.

## Collaboration is Multidimensional

Collaboration increases in impact when multiple alliances develop simultaneously. For Quest, this materializes as a multifaceted model of collaboration that promotes alliances within individual schools, among partner schools and across multiple communal stakeholders. Each alliance has its own purpose but works toward the program's larger goals of teacher excellence.

Within each school, the dean works with individual teachers to identify professional development needs and with administrators to plan schoolwide programs that respond to those needs. They foster a collaborative relationship among teachers by promoting shared learning opportunities such as schoolwide themes, mentoring programs, targeted professional learning



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communities, cross-curricular programs and occasions for teachers to teach one another. Doing so elevates the school's collaborative spirit and ensures that professional development is context- and participant-specific.

Monthly dean meetings, interschool workshops and a biannual communitywide conference turn teachers and administrators from different schools into colleagues. Deans frequently use monthly meetings as a time to coordinate programming around areas of common interest, to workshop ideas with their colleagues, and to experiment with ideas they have learned from one another. Collaborative professional development opportunities initiate learning and dialogue among teachers and administrators from different schools. This dialogue continues through email groups and a communitywide wiki.

A third dimension of the program extends beyond the day schools themselves to encompass a broader Jewish community. Quest is supported by a larger interschool collaboration that identifies day school affordability and excellence as cornerstones of local efforts to strengthen the local Jewish community in numbers and in spirit. It is coordinated by Federation staff members and consultants, is supported by communal donors, and is dependent on a strong collegial relationship among day school leaders, philanthropists, Federation staff and leadership, and the related agencies. In addition, it creates collaboration between schools and local professional development providers, emphasizing the extent to which day schools can benefit from the communal knowledge that surrounds them. Through this dimension, teacher excellence has become a communitywide endeavor.

## Collaboration Strengthens the Parts, in Addition to the Whole

While collaboration often works toward a larger good, it is important to ensure that the needs of individual partners and organizations are considered alongside the needs of the whole. Doing so creates a sound foundation for continual collaboration, trust and growth, and is particularly important when collaborating around context- and participant-specific goals such as professional development.

Quest considers the needs of its schools by empowering school leaders to individualize how they integrate the program into their existing organizational structures. As a result, some schools view the dean as an administrative role, some view the job as a teacher leader's role, and some have developed a combination role. Similarly, some schools split the role in accordance with their school divisions, some split the role based on curricular departments, and some have a single dean overseeing their entire K-12 faculty.

The needs of individual teachers are met by promoting individualized professional development plans. These plans serve as benchmarks for

gauging the teachers' progression of growth and as starting points for the deans' ongoing planning processes. After each program, individual participants are asked to share feedback through online surveys so as to increase the amount of individualized input that is considered when planning subsequent programs.

## Collaboration is a Process

Collaboration cannot be expected to develop overnight; rather, it is a long-term process that requires significant work. Schools were drawn together through shared belief in the importance of professional development and the availability of financial support and educational expertise to actualize that belief in individualized ways. They benefited from the partnership immediately but only became true collaborators over time as they communicated effectively, acted with intentionality and engaged in ongoing reflection to ensure that they are staying true to their shared goals.

After five years, Quest's collaborative process demonstrates thoughtful planning and practiced implementation. The deans have developed their own cultural norms that shape conversations and interactions. Group expectations include structured meetings facilitated by the program coordinator (with breakfast, of course!), transparency, use of Doodles for scheduling purposes, an unstated understanding that phone calls should be used frequently to supplement email communication, and an end-of-the-year dinner for reflection and celebration. They have each developed similar group norms within their own teacher communities.

Feedback and reflection plays an important role in the collaborative process. The annual census helps deans document their schools' goals and the professional development programs that they are pursuing in order to reflect on how the program is helping them achieve their goals. Even the development of this tool has proven to be a process; deans provided input into creation of the tool currently in use, and the results are shared and discussed from year to year.

## Collaboration is a Relationship

Collaboration is best accomplished within a relationship where partners are accepted, valued and trusted as they are. This can be a challenge for alliances that bridge would-be competitors. It is therefore not a prerequisite of collaboration. Rather, collaborators who have been brought into partnership for instrumental purposes develop trusting relationships through consistency, patience and ongoing interaction.

Partners come to trust one another as they learn to appreciate the accomplishments of their colleagues. Often, they must first feel supported and respected for their own accomplishments. The face-to-face dialogue that takes place at monthly dean meetings fosters this process by allowing

deans to share their schools' achievements in a neutral environment where conversation is facilitated by the program coordinator. Through these connections, the deans exchange input and become more and more invested in their colleagues' achievements. This relationship has benefited from the consistency of four of five founding faculty deans. The length of their tenures has enabled them to develop trusting relationships with the administrators and teachers within their schools, the deans from their partner schools and program coordinators.

Within trusting relationships, collaborators are more inclined to participate in the give-and-take that is needed to work together. For example, deans become more inclined to set aside their own priorities to benefit their partners as they choose and schedule collaborative programs.

Even with time and trust, it is not assumed that collaboration can bridge all differences among competing schools. Rather, schools come together around goals that are mutually beneficial and "agree to disagree" in areas they are not yet ready to address in partnership.

## Questions to Consider

The Quest for Teaching Excellence Program demonstrates that communitywide collaboration can enhance professional growth among day school teachers and administrators. Based on our experience, I leave you with five questions to consider as you embark on collaborative efforts within your schools: What will be shared through your collaboration? What are the multiple dimensions of your collaboration? How will your collaboration consider the needs of the individuals, in addition to the needs of the group? What will be the key components of your collaborative process? How will you develop your collaborative relationships?

*The Quest for Teaching Excellence is a program of the Greater Metro West (NJ) Jewish Day School Initiative. The Initiative supports academic excellence and affordability among the Golda Och Academy in West Orange, Gottesman RTW Academy in Randolph, Jewish Educational Center in Elizabeth, and Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy/Rae Kushner Yeshiva High School in Livingston.*

*It is supported by the Jewish Federation of Greater Metrowest, the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Metrowest, the Paula and Jerry Gottesman Family Supporting Foundation, and the Greater Metro West Day School Community Fund.*



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## Innovation Alley



JON MITZMACHER

# (R&D) + (T&L) = Innovation

Welcome to “Innovation Alley”! It is my great honor and pleasure to join the HaYidion team wearing my new Prizmah innovation hat. My goals for this column—part of a larger strategy for showcasing, sharing and introducing innovation for the field—are threefold: 1) Share a new idea. 2) Provide a concrete example. 3) Issue a charge.

### What's the big idea?

We know that one of the challenges our schools face is scarcity—time, bandwidth, resources, finances, etc. Many of our schools and organizations are rightfully invested in the here and now and lack capacity to dream the next dream, let alone bring it to life. One of the many roles national organizations and foundations currently play is to help bring what's next to a school's overcrowded table. Project-based learning, Maker Spaces, blended online learning, personalized learning, multiage classrooms, tablets, design thinking: we often try to graft new ideas onto existing structures, with mixed results. Using the language of innovation, we frequently focus on the product, not the process. But what if we didn't have to? What if schools could build capacity to own the innovation process from soup to nuts? What if individual schools were the engine of research and design?

The idea can be expressed in the formula: (R&D) + (T&L) = Innovation. In the same way that companies like Google have dedicated resources (people, finances, etc.) to do R&D together with the day-to-day work of the organization, so should schools. Imagine a school that had a dedicated budget and faculty to conduct R&D alongside their budget and faculty to perform the day-to-day work of T&L, teaching and learning. Imagine a school that decided for itself which topics to research, conducted its own R&D, developed its own prototypes, led its own pilots, implemented its new products, evaluated its new products' efficacy, scaled products when appropriate and produced reports on their work to the field. That would be an innovative school in action. That would be the American School of Bombay (ASB).

### Who's doing it?

Founded in 1981 as an international school, the ASB is one preK-12 school spread over two campuses in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India. Its mission is to “inspire all of our students to continuous inquiry, empowering them with the skills, courage, optimism

and integrity to pursue their dreams and enhance the lives of others.” The school has always been at the vanguard of 21st century learning, early adopters and adapters of a variety of cutting-edge technologies and pedagogies, but what makes it unique is its commitment to R&D as a core value and key engine for innovation.

During a late-night summer Skype, I had occasion to learn more from ASB R&D core team member and prolific education blogger Maggie Hos-McGrane. She shared with me ASB's model for conducting R&D, which includes all the elements of a strategic innovation process, from idea through implementation. Ideas for R&D can come from anywhere on faculty, from classroom teacher to senior administration, and can range across subject, grade level and topic. Once an idea moves to R&D, task forces consisting of both R&D and T&L faculty are created to move the idea through the established steps. They do a tremendous job documenting their work, and even wrote a book for schools that want to create an R&D engine for themselves.

### What's the charge?

To locate the engine of innovation within Jewish day schools represents a profound paradigm shift worth taking seriously. I believe that viewing “innovation” as something the school does rather than something it purchases or implements increases the likelihood of ongoing school improvement. Adopting an innovation mindset may positively impact the life of the school even outside the areas where a given innovation is being implemented. It will encourage all stakeholders—students, teachers, parents, administration, board and donors—to take ownership of the big ideas that constitute the school's value proposition. It will foster a culture of growth, of risk-taking and of collaboration.



### How can I learn more?

Buy the book: *R&D Your School: How to Start, Grow, and Sustain Your School's Innovation Engine*.

Read Maggie's blog, “Tech Transformation.”

Watch current ASB superintendent Craig Johnston's TEDxBandra Talk.

Stay current on ASB's Task Force Findings.

See what new ideas ASB promotes in its “Future Forward” publications.

**Dr. Jon Mitzmacher is Prizmah's vice president of innovation. [jonm@prizmah.org](mailto:jonm@prizmah.org).**

# CASJE

## Collaborative Research for Advancing the JDS Field

How many times have you been asked, at school or in the boardroom, what the research says on a particular topic that is critical to your work in schools? How often have you thought, if we only knew why teaching X is so difficult or the best way to teach Y, we could increase significantly student learning and the quality of our schools? These are questions that practitioners often face and that funders often seek to answer. As the superintendent of a public K-8 system and the head of a large JK-12 Jewish day school, we are fortunate to be involved in a first-of-its-kind effort to coordinate the work of a diverse range of researchers, practitioners and funders who believe that evidence should drive decision-making in Jewish education. To this end, the Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education (CASJE) was formed in 2012 to help develop applied research programs focused on high-priority areas in Jewish education.



By design, CASJE is a collaborative venture to enrich and expand the evidence base to guide improvement of practice and investment of resources in Jewish education. The basic proposition is that rigorous interdisciplinary research (hence the idea of “consortium”), grounded in the problems practitioners face, can generate useful knowledge for the field of Jewish education.

### What Is “Applied” Research?

Applied research aims to solve practical problems. To do this, researchers and practitioners work together to conceptualize a research program in a given field (e.g., language education) based on real problems practitioners face, the findings from which can be applied to a specific issue. The research is rooted in both theory and evidence, oriented to practical problem solving, and fueled by early and sustained engagement between researchers, practitioners and other potential users of research. The goal of all applied research is to yield “actionable knowledge” to improve practice in that field.



## How Does Collaboration Work at CASJE?

Most of CASJE's collaborative research programs start with a "problem formulation convening" (PFC), with the goal of bringing practitioners, researchers and funders together to define an issue in the field that would benefit from high-quality research. As one example, in May of 2015, we held a PFC on Jewish early childhood educational leadership. That convening led to a new CASJE initiative, funded by the Crown family, that will explore how Jewish early childhood education can serve as a gateway for greater and long-term involvement in Jewish life. The three-year research program will focus on better understanding opportunities around interfaith families and families that are not currently involved in a synagogue or other Jewish institution. We hope that over time, a series of connected studies can inform the development, training, practice, improvement efforts and impact of Jewish educational leaders and leadership in Jewish early childhood educational settings.

CASJE's research program in Jewish educational leadership in day schools is another example of collaboration and is the most ambitious applied research initiative in Jewish education to date. Launched in fall 2014, this groundbreaking three-year study is exploring what characterizes effective leadership in Jewish day schools and, more specifically, what constitutes distinctively Jewish educational leadership in the field.

Led by a research team from the American Institutes for Research (AIR), and supported by contributions from the AVI CHAI and Mandell and Madeline Berman Foundations, this research project was developed in concert with colleagues who work in Jewish day schools across the United States. In addition to yielding valuable and usable information about effective educational leadership generally, the study will provide insight into the distinct characteristics of effective Jewish leaders. It examines which qualities correlate with high levels of satisfaction and retention among teachers, with a positive school climate, and with student outcomes that are aligned with the school's academic, social-emotional, ethical and religious learning goals.

One element of this research is the administration of an assessment tool that targets educational leaders at 30 schools. The tool is administered twice, and the school leaders receive feedback that allows them to reflect on their practice and consider changing anything they deem necessary. At the conclusion of the study, this research has the potential to make a significant impact on the quality of educational leadership in Jewish day schools. This project represents not only a collaboration between practitioners, researchers and funders that is at the core of the CASJE model, but also among those in both general studies and Jewish studies at day schools. The project brings to bear the highest level research methodologies in education to advance our understanding of the practices that comprise positive Jewish educational leadership.

## Lessons Learned So Far About Successful Collaboration

Over the last four years, CASJE has learned significant lessons about effective collaboration. When bringing together multiple individuals, academic institutions and Jewish organizations—with varying missions and areas of expertise—we see the importance of

- maintaining open and frequent lines of communication, particularly around the status of projects and any changes to an existing research program agenda;
- face-to-face interactions, even in the era of new media and virtual convenings. The in-person gatherings of CASJE's PFCs, for example, not only ease the exchange of ideas, but also serve as important forums to develop professional relationships across research and practice that build trust and often result in new, creative ideas that improve our work;
- engaging a variety of partners from the start. It may mean that significant time is spent building context and expectations, but the payoff is often a much richer product than any that one of the participants would have developed on their own; and
- managing and balancing schedules. Simply, more people involved means more schedules to coordinate. We know now that not everyone involved in a project will be able to engage in every related activity. Respect people's time and the time they are giving to collaborate with others.

Both of us share a strong belief that CASJE represents a new model that can make a difference in the lives of Jewish children and Jewish institutions. Funders, researchers and practitioners—including school leaders—can and are collaborating to strengthen Jewish education. While developing applied research is slow, methodical and steady work, the secular education world offers numerous examples of the benefits that come. As just one, the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research has done extensive work over a 20+ year period on the extent to which students are on track to graduate high school. As a result of this work, schools now have benchmarks with which to examine whether or not their students are on track and can intervene when needed. They have found that if students miss up to 10 days of attendance during their freshman year, and especially at the beginning of freshman year, they will have an extremely difficult time being successful in high school. These findings have led to shifting practices on suspensions and on making sure that counselors and school officials pay close attention to freshman attendance. This is useful and usable knowledge that changes practices.



Similarly, we hope the fruits of labor in Jewish education provide usable knowledge for its education leaders and educators, too. Critically, all of CASJE-supported applied research is accessible to anyone at [www.casje.org](http://www.casje.org). Moreover, along with accessing the research, we hope that more educators and leaders join the important conversations and grow the community of hundreds of others with different expertise and past experiences. Share what you believe will help improve learning experiences and outcomes for youth. Ask the questions that, if answered, will help you think in new and different ways about Jewish education. By working together, funders, researchers and practitioners strengthen the field and strengthen our Jewish future.

# Commentary

## **Rabbi Daniel Alter, head of school, Moriah School, Englewood, NJ:**

Unmanaged conflict in a school environment can prove dangerous when faculty have not been prepared for the type of culture Lencioni describes. School faculty tend to be sensitive, kind, caring and soft-spoken. The messy conflict that he describes will cause extreme upset and can fracture relationships. Modeling appropriate conflict behavior is insufficient. A school leader must have an open conversation about the culture of debate and conflict that he or she is looking to nurture, and work with his or her team to develop norms, rules and expectations. Then they can scaffold the lesson of how to manage conflict by debriefing following both successful and unsuccessful conflicts to determine what was helpful, what was a waste of time and what caused hurt and anger.

## **Merrill Hendin, head of school, Portland Jewish Academy, Portland, OR:**

As we embark on our self-study toward reaccreditation and look at a re-envisioning of our middle school, the word “messy” reverberates for me. Our administrative team talks a great deal about allowing for the mess—which might mean that we may not all be comfortable in a conversation and may have to agree to disagree; that we will be challenged to maintain our strong Jewish values and identity, while ensuring that we are innovative, engaging and diverse. Realizing that these things are not mutually exclusive, that our middot can help guide us through the process and that difficult and tricky issues may come up, is all a part of the bigger process of collaboration and Jewish engagement. We must always keep the mission of the school and the students at the center. Modeling the idea of thinking for one’s self and working for the world, a statement which stands at the foundation of who we are at PJA, helps us understand that sometimes one has to get messy in order to effect positive change.

“Therefore, it is key that leaders demonstrate restraint when their people engage in conflict, and allow resolution to occur naturally, as messy as it can sometimes be. This can be a challenge because many leaders feel that they are somehow failing in their jobs by losing control of their teams during conflict. Finally, as trite as it may sound, a leader’s ability to personally model appropriate conflict behavior is essential. By avoiding conflict when it is necessary and productive—something many executives do—a team leader will encourage this dysfunction to thrive.”

**Patrick Lencioni,  
*Five Dysfunctions of a Team***

## **Rabbi Micah Lapidus EdD, director of Hebrew and Jewish studies, Davis Academy, Atlanta:**

Lencioni’s observation regarding personal modelling of appropriate conflict behavior is anything other than “trite.” In fact, it presents a real challenge that leaders do well to embrace. Conflict is, by its very nature, emotionally charged. Cultivating the presence of mind and spirit to look closely at one’s own tendencies and patterns during conflict requires serious work. Few of us are born with the intuitive knowledge of how to navigate the many conflicts that emerge over the months and years. One way that leaders can earn and keep the respect of others is by cultivating this knowledge and modelling it.

## **Daniella Pressner, director of Jewish studies, Akiva School, Nashville:**

As leaders, we are often more willing to be vulnerable and take risks after having opportunities to observe masters at work. One of the most important lessons I learned from coach Larry Levine, who introduced me to Bruce Tuckman’s work on group formation, was not only to be

knowledgeable about the stages that teams experience (forming, storming, norming, performing, termination/ending) but to expect them. In situations where I proactively share that conflict will be inevitable, uncomfortable and hopefully productive, teams are more willing to commit to working through the discomfort for the greater vision. Very early in my educational career, I had the opportunity to observe the way that Rabbi Dov Lerea directed groups at Camp Yavneh, a pluralistic camp in Massachusetts. Dov created the vision for what pluralistic living at camp would look like and

worked with people from diverse backgrounds and beliefs to make this happen. Camps are filled with passion, tension and conflicting needs, and Dov’s willingness to state the discomfort helped move groups through difficult processes that proved to be transformational for the individuals involved and for the camp as a whole. Thanks to these teachers, I am more willing to embrace conflict and struggle because I can now trust both the process and the people. Perhaps more importantly, I have had opportunities to witness the powerful changes that occur when conflict is allowed to materialize and mature.

# The Transformative Value

## of Fieldwide Teacher Collaboration



Last summer, four day schools in the Midwest came together to explore a common challenge: how to differentiate instruction in a Hebrew classroom to meet the needs of students with varying levels of knowledge and experience. Teams of educators and administrators from each school—Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School in St. Louis, Akiva School in Nashville, The Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor and Hyman Brand Academy of Kansas City—met at Mirowitz to learn about differentiation from a master general-education instructor, and to discuss among themselves how to apply this learning to a Hebrew classroom.

The educators' energy and enthusiasm, both in bonding as teams and in meeting and networking with one another, was overwhelming. With multiple teams sporting school shirts, morale was very high; despite the fact that some of these schools resumed sessions the following week, they were nevertheless investing this time in their professional development and forging relationships with other educators. The instructor remarked early in the day how he couldn't tell which educators had existing relationships and which had become instant best friends with "complete strangers."

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Online Judaic Studies Consortium

גשר ללימודי יהדות A Bridge to Jewish Learning

The professional development day is one example of collaborations that are taking place within the JDS Collaborative, with funding from The AVI CHAI Foundation. Where can we find the leverage to strengthen the Jewish mission of schools throughout the day school field? The Collaborative aims to provide one answer: Collaboration by teachers and leaders within schools and between schools can allow school change to take place in the most efficient and effective manner through the creation, prototyping and spread of new ideas, forging of new relationships, and sharing of resources. The Collaborative's unique process connects day school leaders and teachers over long distances; focuses them on challenging aspects of their Jewish mission at their school; and ignites collaborations on projects that they believe will address the challenge, largely through online networking strategies. Additionally, there is some funding to support professional development and travel opportunities.

The Hebrew differentiation project is one of 21 such projects currently underway in the Collaborative. These projects range from designing curricula using game-based learning, to developing Hebrew language activities built around real-life opportunities and experiences, to using educational simulations to explore scenarios school leaders face regarding Judaic teachers and curriculum content and tradition vs. innovation. Below are the implications we have seen from this work so far regarding the features that are most important for achieving impact and success.

First, while school participation depends on the school leaders' buy-in and investment in the concept and its potential for application at the school, we have found that in many cases it is most effective for the majority of the work to be done by the teachers themselves. School leaders are simply too busy to be as invested in the daily process, and in the end it is the teachers in whose classrooms the resulting projects will be implemented.

Moreover, we have learned that Jewish day school teachers are indeed hungry for opportunities to form relationships with other teachers and to be exposed to resources, ideas and connections outside the four walls of their classrooms. When Cheryl Maayan, head of school at Mirowitz, opened the Hebrew differentiation day by asking the group to share about challenges in Hebrew instruction in a Jewish day school environment, the room exploded with everyone wanting to contribute.

"This is an area of growth for Jewish day schools. There are lots of opportunities in the field for leaders to connect, but we don't always provide these opportunities for faculty," said Maayan. She serves on the Collaborative's Leadership Team along with Rabbi Dr. Gil Perl, head of Kohelet Yeshiva High School in Philadelphia; Dr. Michael Kay, head of Solomon Schechter of Westchester; Larry Kligman, head of the Abraham Joshua Heschel Day School in Los Angeles; and Jill Kessler, head of Pardes Jewish Day School in Phoenix.

Suzanne Mishkin of the Sager Solomon Schechter Day School in Northbrook, Illinois, which is participating this year in a project about STEAM and the chagim, emphasized the benefits of sharing expertise. "We are interested in the Collaborative because we believe it is important to be able to pool resources. I worked for public school for many years, where there are many schools in a district, so you have access to educators with varied experiences and new ideas. There are great ideas in our building, but to be able to go outside and collaborate is always a positive experience."

Second, we are finding the Collaborative's support in project management is an essential resource in order to make sure projects come to fruition. Jonathan Cannon, director of the Collaborative, employs the following steps in the process of forming new projects:

- recruiting potential participants
- eliciting their priorities for improvement of their school's Jewish vision and practice

- connecting participants who face similar challenges and/or opportunities
- helping them formalize this commonality into projects around which they can collaborate.

While school leaders and faculty alike are enthusiastic about participating, they have very busy schedules, and the friendly guidance of Alanna Kotler, Collaborative project manager, can make the difference between a successfully implemented project and one that falls by the wayside. Kotler ensures that projects stay on track through managing the team roles and responsibilities and breaking down deliverables, milestones and deadlines.

The Hebrew differentiation project reveals how participants develop their work through collaboration and resource-sharing. In the time since the day of learning, the schools narrowed down their focus to differentiation strategies for second grade Hebrew reading fluency, and together determined the standards they wanted to work on. The Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School of Rockville, Maryland, subsequently joined the project, and its Hebrew reading specialist created a webinar that was given to 15 teachers and administrators at Mirowitz and Akiva. After the webinar, teachers worked in their schools to create new benchmarks for reading fluency and share lesson ideas of how to differentiate instruction in light of student assessment. The schools are currently working on furthering the work in their schools to better define assessment and fluency criteria.

The process represents a shift in the way many day schools approach challenges that can seem beyond the ability of the school to address. "The Collaborative is the first opportunity we've had to think about a problem from within our school rather than joining an external program that's been created for us. The impact has been subtle but profound. There hasn't been any one 'aha moment' or one stand out experience but every few weeks gained more information and pushed forward. Now, a year later, we have come a long way," said Daniella Pressner, Principal at Akiva.

Third, we are unearthing at what stages of this process collaboration is most helpful, and to what end. What is the best model for structuring collaboration among multiple day schools such that it is a value added rather than an obstruction to a successful outcome? What unexpected benefits of collaboration may not have been anticipated?

We are finding that collaboration among different schools is most valued for the learning (professional development) and evaluation phases, whereas collaboration within a school is prioritized during the implementation phase.

One ancillary reported benefit of the Collaborative is that collaboration between teachers teaching the same topic and administrators within each school itself has increased enormously and has been sustained, leading to a culture of cooperation that has the potential to transform relationships between colleagues and positively impact student learning as a result. "Our experience is showing that the sustainability of projects that had collaboration in the schools is greater because of the joint conversation and accountability," Cannon said.

In conclusion, day school collaboration is critical because it allows schools to share resources, which is not only more efficient, but also leads to the spread of new ideas. "As a Jewish day school field, we need to figure out more effective ways to share resources. I don't just mean financial resources but that sense of support, the idea that someone has your back," Pressner said.

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**If you are interested in learning more about the Collaborative, please contact Jonathan Cannon at [jonathan@educannonconsulting.com](mailto:jonathan@educannonconsulting.com).**

# Meet the Board

## Ann Pava

### *Tell us something about yourself.*

I am a modern Orthodox Jew who believes passionately in the Jewish people. I am a true believer in the power of the collective (I think that comes from my background as a union organizer). I know that this belief in the power of the collective is why the Jewish Federation movement has been one of my great passions. As immediate past chair of National Women's Philanthropy, I have traveled the world with JFNA. I have seen the needs of the Jewish people firsthand—and have also seen firsthand the ability we have to make the world a better place, for all of humanity.

I also have seen firsthand that there aren't enough committed Jewish people to follow in the footsteps of those who work tirelessly for the Jewish people.

**That is why I am passionate about Jewish day schools.** Because it is day school graduates who will be our next generation of Jewish communal leaders.

I inevitably get asked two questions every time I visit a community. What is the best outreach event you have ever attended, and who is the best speaker you have ever heard?

I think people are disappointed when I tell them that there is absolutely no event, speaker or program that can engage a young person in a meaningful way for the long term. Not even birthright lasts forever. And quite honestly—by college it is already too late for deep impact. The answer, I tell them, is if they are looking to engage young Jews, they must start by looking at their Jewish day schools. We must make our day schools affordable—excellent—and, **as Jewish leaders, encourage everyone to send their children.** Judaism becomes a natural part of a student's identity when they attend day school. It is not something they do after school (and hate); it is not something they only do in the summer; and it is not something they do in a one-week trip to Israel. It simply becomes part of who they are: They grow up to be knowledgeable, committed adults.

### *What do you bring to the Prizmah board?*

I can help Prizmah with visibility and advocacy, and have the ability to travel if I'm needed. As someone with a national portfolio with JFNA, I have many connections with Jewish communities across North America and Israel. I am an articulate advocate for day schools—I am a past founding president of a Jewish high school—and I am good at fundraising, both strategically and with personally asking people to donate.

### *Do you have a favorite Jewish teaching?*

"God stands together with the poor person at the door, and one should therefore consider before whom one is actually standing." Vayikra Rabbah 34:9



Ann Pava



Candy Berman

I try to live my life with this understanding: to always remain humble as a philanthropist, and to treat every one with kindness and dignity, knowing that God stands with each and everyone of us no matter where we happen to be at any given moment in time.

I also love this teaching as a Jewish communal leader, knowing that we need to be sensitive to people at all times. Because poor doesn't necessarily mean poor of funds—we can be poor of health, poor of spirits, poor of physical surroundings (so many hurricanes and floods), even poor of education (no Jewish day school!). It is our duty to recognize those in need and act when we can. This is how we create a strong and compassionate community.

## Candy Berman

### *Tell us something about yourself.*

I grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, at the time that the world was changing. There was so much bigotry and racism and anti-Semitism. It wasn't unusual to have kids throw pennies and rocks at us and call us "dirty Jew." We were excluded from country clubs and high school fraternities and sororities. Because of this, I developed a tremendous Jewish identity... mainly because the other kids would not let me forget. I had no clue what being Jewish meant and I certainly wasn't proud of it, until I went to Israel when I was 17. I couldn't believe the people there and the pride they felt. I was committed to my children understanding their identity from a positive perspective, not negative.

That is why I am so passionate about Jewish education. When I see my grandchildren proud of who they are and actually pity those whom they meet who aren't Jewish, it warms my heart.

### *What do you bring to the Prizmah board?*

I bring diversity to the Prizmah board, as I am not a lawyer! I am a creative thinker, and I use this in my business of planning conferences and fundraising events for nonprofits. I am passionate about collaborations and forsaking turf issues. And that's what Prizmah is all about. I can also help (and have already done so!) on thinking through our conferences.

### *Do you have a favorite Jewish teaching?*

I have two quotes that I use a lot. My favorite quote is from Golda Meir: Don't be so humble. You're not that great.

Another is from Robert Woodruff, a well-known philanthropist and a former president of the Coca-Cola Company for 30 years. To paraphrase his quote: It's amazing what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit.

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# PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools

#WeArePrizmah

# Board-Head Collaboration

## When Best Practices Aren't

The sine qua non for a Jewish school's functional governance lies in creating an effective partnership between the institution's professional administration and its lay leadership. Choose virtually any of the array of consultants to make a presentation to your board and you are guaranteed to spend a major chunk of time discussing this axiom. Board manuals for Jewish schools across the country should include a preprinted page with the concept emblazoned in bold letters. Boards support the head of school primarily by raising money, leaving the operations—educational, recruiting and fiscal—to the professionals. Lay leaders cross this line at the peril of the school's ability to function.

And this discussion has become ubiquitous for very good reason. Malfunctions and failures in the crucial interface between professional and lay leadership can kill an institution faster than just about any other malady. But labeling something as “best practice” does not explain how it applies to challenging circumstances. Despite our affinity for black letter law, while certain common foundational requirements permeate all healthy situations, there exists no static one-size-fits-all approach to board-professional relationships. Even within the confines of one institution, the nature of the relationship will invariably ebb and flow as a function of the particular challenges presented at any given time, as well as the unique talents and skill sets of the professional and lay personnel on hand.

You would not find one nurse or doctor who would disagree that a surgical suite must be completely sterile under all circumstances. An accidental scratch of the nose will get anyone evicted from an OR. But at a trauma site, the role of the medical personnel shifts to triage—identifying the worst problems, mitigating damage, and making the best of a difficult situation. In other words, “best practices” must shift to accommodate the exigencies of reality. A melodramatic analogy? Probably. But consider this: What if the school's administration lacks the ability to face the challenges presented? Should lay leaders who have created, funded and internalized the school's

mission sit on their hands for fear of crossing the line away from “best practices”? What if doing so would come at a terrible cost?

The ongoing turnaround story of Los Angeles's Shalhevet High School provides a useful study of the ways in which the strengths and weaknesses of the relationship between professional and lay leadership can impact the success or failure of a Jewish school, on even an existential level. By deviating—at times significantly—from the accepted best practices, the school has managed to navigate several distinct sea changes, and finds itself steadied and ready to face the inevitable storm fronts yet to come.

### Best Practices Violation #1: Leave the Recruiting to the School's Professionals

Shalhevet was founded in 1991 to deliver a Torah-driven education designed to foster a higher moral development with everyday, practical application, providing equal emphasis on girls' and boys' education, and dedicated to addressing the needs of each student rather than squeezing kids into a predefined box. The core ideas—particularly the coeducational model and the emphasis on a democratic model featuring student participation in the school's day-to-day governance—presented a challenge to the status quo in

LA's Orthodox community. The school not only struggled to gain a foothold among the community of feeder schools and synagogues, but indeed sustained a consistent barrage of attacks, often of the ad hominem variety.

A best-practices approach to the challenge would have involved the head of school adjusting recruitment policies and simply building the better mousetrap, with the board providing support from behind the scenes. Any single person involved in the Shalhevet endeavor at the time will affirm that had the leadership taken such an approach, the school would have slipped away with a whimper. The situation required a drastically more hands-on approach by the lay leadership. First, the board voted with its collective feet and checkbook. Board members sent their kids to the school when others were afraid of a new venture, and directly recruited within the largely skeptical community. They opened their checkbooks and essentially underwrote the school's operations. They actively and zealously advocated for the school at countless Shabbat tables. Addressing the community's constant concerns and misunderstanding of the school, the "trust the head of school" approach would simply not have sufficed. The school survived not only in spite of, but *because* it departed from best practices. The key lay leaders put the marketing efforts on their backs, backed it up by sending their own kids to the new school and lobbying their friends to send their kids, and time and time again used their own personal resources to fund the nascent institution.

## Best Practices Violation #2: Let the School's Professional Leadership Weather the Storms of Crisis

By 2008, a steady decrease in Shalhevet's enrollment had coincided with a rapid increase in both the number of students receiving financial assistance and the total amount of assistance granted. The school attempted to stem the drop in enrollment by accepting students and families who were not mission-appropriate. These steps severely diluted the value of the product being offered and the financial picture deteriorated. A decade of borrowing money to survive came crashing down as the school found itself massively overleveraged and running a dramatically unsustainable deficit. The school teetered on extinction.

Perhaps most important: the school's professional leadership was ill-equipped to handle this massive challenge. Again, best practices will tell you that the job of the board under those circumstances was to go find the right head of school and empower him or her with the tools necessary to succeed. And here's a spoiler alert: that is exactly what the board eventually did. But at this crucial moment in time, the school was in no position to conduct a search when the place was crumbling around them. The rubber was hitting the road, and lay leadership had to choose: go all-in or let the school die a natural death.

The answer came from the school's indefatigable president, who essentially devoted every resource she had—energy, time and money—to the school. It cannot be overstated: she *embodied* the school and internalized every one of its problems. With the participation of a very small group of committed leaders, she financed the school's bleeding operations. When key staff, spooked by the grim reality, looked for more secure employment, she personally convinced them to stay. Key families in the community left their kids in the school—and in many cases actually enrolled them at the school—based almost entirely on their confidence in her. Under her leadership, in a desperate attempt to save the core high school program, the board itself made the extraordinarily difficult decision to close the early childhood, lower and middle school programs. Once the situation stabilized to a degree, the board shifted its focus to finding the right head of school for the incredible challenge presented. But make no mistake: for the better part of two years, the lay leadership had a hands-on role in virtually every function of the school, and essentially served as the de facto head of school and sometimes of a personal guarantor for the school's success.

Board consultants reading this likely will cringe at the total obliteration of the line between lay and professional leadership. But at the end of the day, with the fate of the school literally in the balance, the lay leadership simply did what it had to do. To be sure, the circumstances were fortuitous: a lay leader of incredible skill, means and dedication occupied the key leadership position at the perfect moment. But had the board opted for a more measured approach in keeping with norms of governance, the school would not have survived.

## Best Practices Violation #3: Delegate to Create a Diffuse and Broad Consensus

Though the situation had been temporarily stabilized, the new head of school inherited a largely rudderless ship taking on water in multiple places. Enrollment, recruiting, financial operations, fundraising, physical plant, staff morale—virtually every practical component of the school stood in disrepair. Armed with little more than a belief in the mission and the commitment and wherewithal to back it up, the lay leadership had employed drastic measures to save the school, but now handed the new HOS an institution barely functioning in terms of operations and governance. To make matters more drastic, a loan was coming due and the school again stared down the barrel of extinction.

At that moment, the HOS and the president of the school made a decision that again departed from best practices. With ample time, they both understood that the correct approach would be to work with the key constituencies of the school in building a consensus for devising and implementing a turnaround strategy. But facing imminent disaster, the head of school worked with a tight circle of lay leaders and professionals, and devised a turnaround plan that involved financial planning, development, staff recruiting, admissions, public relations, board recruiting and virtually every other component of school operations. Again, as luck would have it, one of the lay leaders had a background in financial turnarounds that lent itself well to the requirements of the situation, and another essentially took the entirety of the fundraising burden on his own able shoulders.

Contrary to almost every principle of effective lay leadership, the small team presented and "sold" the plan as more of a fait accompli than a proposal. While fraught with potential negative repercussions, this circling of the wagons enabled the school to implement a complete turnaround with lightning speed that exceeded any expectations. The school presently occupies a brand new building, has gone from a dramatically eroded enrollment to being maxed out at capacity, and boasts a faculty and a curriculum that is the envy of Jewish schools across the country.

## Conclusions

A couple very important points must be made. Without question, the heroic measures of a few dedicated and capable people proved essential in Shalhevet's surviving a genuinely existential crisis, but the bedrock of the school's current firm foundation lies squarely in the leadership and vision of the new head of school and the talented staff he has recruited and installed. And the inability to adhere to best practices comes at a cost. Among the many challenges facing the new president are dealing with a key donor base that is simply exhausted from years of carrying the school, and restructuring board governance in a manner designed to derive full advantage from the diverse skill and talents sitting around the board table.

Best practices are so-named for a very good reason. When an organization is operating at a high level of function, and even when that organization is faced with trying times, the clear line between professional and lay leadership provides the firm and stable footing essential to success. But sometimes drastic times call for unusual measures. At those moments, Jewish schools must not be afraid to think outside the box and utilize the unique skills of the people in key leadership positions.

## Collaborating Toward a

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# Better Staff Culture

### The Situation

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When I began my first principalship, I knew I had my work cut out for me. I had plans for working on curriculum and professional development as well as many other small projects, but I knew I needed to work on staff culture before I tackled anything else. At a meeting I had had with a large group of the teachers as part of the interview for this position, I noticed, even in this small window of time, evident tension between departments. There were clear issues surrounding differences in culture and religious observance among the staff. It was obvious that no significant pedagogical change could happen until the staff was able to work together.

A second, seemingly unrelated issue was the fact that the school was due for reaccreditation in that first year. When I arrived for my first day we had less than eight months before our site visit. The deadline for submitting a lengthy and involved treatise on the state of the school in 12 different areas, which had not been started at all, was even sooner. The last time the school had gone through this process they hired someone to coordinate the writing of this volume; this time the task fell to me, the new principal.

### A Plan for Collaboration

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Initially these two challenges were not connected in my mind. I had a plan of attack for moving the culture forward, but it did not involve the accreditation report specifically. I made clear to the staff my assumption that we were going to work as a team, and I constantly circled back to this idea. All emails to groups started with the term “team”: dear admin team, dear first grade team, dear Judaic team. We planned consistent and regular staff meetings. Initially, the purpose of these meetings was to develop our staff professionally together, but the massive amount of work needed for the accreditation report meant that we needed to commandeer most of the time toward having teams of teachers work on the report. We needed to use this to our advantage. As part of the shift

toward a more positive staff culture, I had planned to have teachers get together on shared tasks in mixed groups in order to force some of the disparate groups to reorganize. The accreditation report gave us a great opportunity.

Creating an accreditation report without having experience doing so was a difficult task, compounded by the fact that the teachers were being asked to collaborate in a way that they were not used to. They also had not previously been asked to take this type of stake in the school and to be involved in aspects which were so far outside their classroom duties. Despite these issues, the results of this collaboration were overwhelmingly positive. Over the year there was a clear change in the tenor of staff conversations. I found that we were able to discuss more sensitive issues in staff meetings. This began toward the end of the first year and had a ripple effect in the subsequent years of meetings. Jumping into a collaborative task seemed to have been an excellent way to create a culture more attuned to collaboration.

### Structuring the Collaborative Task

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Not all tasks or structures will be well received or have the desired outcome. Having staff rush into a collaborative task without specific training and preparation for working together is a risk. There are four aspects to the task and the structure that helped this risky endeavor coalesce into a positive change in staff culture:

- It was an important task that was tied to the mission and vision of the school.
- We used groupings that were specifically designed for our needs.
- The project had a clear structure and a measurable goal.
- The entire group was accountable for the result.

The task needs to be relevant and important, and needs to be clearly communicated to the teachers. In our case, the task was something that was necessary for the school to be accredited. The teachers understood how critical the accreditation process was to our school, for recruitment among other reasons. We presented the report as

important internally as well, since it would serve as a snapshot of how we were doing educationally as a school and parlay into the roadmap of our growth areas. This resonated deeply with teachers who were frustrated with specific (different) aspects of the school and shared a commitment to changing the school for the better.

Teachers need to be grouped heterogeneously, keeping their personalities in mind. The heterogeneous grouping is critical in having teachers work in teams that would not form naturally. We created groups that always included at least one general studies, one Hebrew and one Judaic teacher in order to meet our goal of fostering communication and collaboration among the departments. These groupings were frequently not intuitive, given that each group was writing about a specific area of the school, requiring in-depth knowledge. Some teachers may have felt that they were not able to contribute much to the group. Nonetheless, the gains in terms of a feeling of cohesion among the staff were worth it.

The outcome must be clearly delineated so that the groups will spend their time engaged in productive collaboration. In our case, each group had a concrete document to return to the administration by a specific date, requirements tied directly to the externally imposed timeline. We also provided a clear structure for their writeup. Since we had the previous report, we gave them examples of their sections from an earlier submission. This may have cut down on the creativity and the degree to which they fully generated the document, but the gains in clarity made it the right move in this circumstance.

In order to reinforce the idea that the group is expected to collaborate, the accountability must be groupwide. Our groups were

given time at staff meetings to work on their respective sections. I did not pick someone to lead the group, nor did I ask the group to pick a leader. When one member would communicate with me about the project, I would include the entire group on my response to reinforce my expectation that they all take responsibility for their work. Although some teachers chose to play less of a role than I would have liked, continuing to keep them accountable minimized this issue.

## Conclusion

It is common for schools to engage in specific team-building sessions during in-service or orientation days. While there is value in this type of activity, I have not found it to provide the same team feel and culture shift as jumping into an actual task they need to accomplish together. Some teachers get impatient with team-building sessions that feel artificial, when they want to get right into the work of changing a school for the better. Teachers tend to be passionate about educating children and making schools engines of growth and development. Working on a substantive task that is directly related to their passion is a very effective way for teachers to connect with one another.

Administrators who take this approach on important tasks must expect that the process of getting the task done will be messier. However, the final product will usually be just as good, and frequently even better, and the cohesion created will be more lasting, effective and relevant to the school's culture.



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MARC LINDNER

# Facing the Challenges

## of Collaborative Leadership

Collaborative leadership has great potential to help elevate Jewish day schools. It is grounded in our traditions of questioning, wrestling with issues and considering alternative perspectives. In practice, it involves a leader who empowers others to play substantive roles in planning programs and events, in decision-making about issues of import to the school and in visioning for the school's future. The collaborative leader guides others to move efficiently through their processes of conceiving, brainstorming and formulating, from start to finish.

If collaborative leadership is to be adopted more widely in our schools, there's a crucial question that needs to be answered: Why are some leaders resistant to it?

### Starting Out: Patience and Courage

Collaborative leadership takes time and patience. Given the hectic pace of school life, it requires resolve and discipline to guide a group process. It's hard to lead collaboratively when a unilateral decision is quicker: checking a task off a long list and moving on. Collaborative leadership also puts a leader in the position of facing disagreement and conflict. There's no hiding from it. If a group process is going to be worthwhile, a leader must deal with discontent.

### Overcoming Fears

Truth be told, a leader is bound to grapple with any number of fears when considering a collaborative approach. What if it takes too long? What if personality styles or groups norms are difficult to manage? What if it doesn't go well and the leader is viewed as a failure? What if people in the school perceive the leader as weak or unable to take charge? If the leader cedes control, will she or he ever be able to regain it?

### Repairing the Self: *Tikkun Atzmi*

After moving beyond the initial hurdles, a leader needs to be prepared for deeper self-examination in order to be responsive to the challenges to come. Before engaging in *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), one should first engage in *tikkun atzmi* (repairing the self). The expression *tikkun atzmi* can be traced to the beginning of Pirkei Avot: "The world rests on three things, *torah*, *avodah*, and *gemilut hasadim*" (1:2)—where *avodah* refers to the work to be done in the Temple. After the destruction of the Temple, this dictum broadened and came to include spiritual work—*tikkun atzmi*. Spiritual work, looking at oneself honestly and even critically, is invaluable for engaging with others and facilitating collaborative processes.

### Balancing Risk and Reward

Jumping in the deep end, even if the water's cold and a bit murky, may bring a multitude of benefits to leaders and their schools. When people participate in the decision to take a specific course of action, they feel ownership of that course of action and are more likely to take initiative for implementing it. Having worked through problems and conflicts together, members of a group come to trust one another for the sake of the current initiative and for the future. Garnering and utilizing the wisdom, insight and experience of a number of individuals is advantageous to the school. Members

of a collaborative group think through problems, voice opinions, suggest solutions, imagine and predict outcomes, and follow through with plans. Those who excel in the various stages of group work may be tapped for leadership (or additional leadership) in the school.

## Curbing the Ego

The collaborative leader must be prepared to put the ego aside, let others voice their ideas and thought processes, and even shift her/his own thinking on topics at hand. For the leader, this requires self-awareness, metacognition and emotional hardiness. The goal is for the leader to selflessly guide group processes to outcomes that are consistent with the mission, vision and values of the school and that help the school reach ever-higher levels of excellence.

## Harnessing the Power of Listening

True, sustained, deep listening is difficult in any context. As the facilitator of a group process, the leader needs to maintain heightened focus on what's being said by everyone. No thinking about the *chaggim* or dinner plans. This is definitely not the time for the leader to check

emails or text messages. Full focus on what's being discussed is necessary as the leader needs to assess the perspectives of individual group members. When an individual with a particular perspective or belief is subtly (or not so subtly) clinging to a position, and doing so is counterproductive to the group's process, that's the leader's cue to intervene. By the same token, when an individual makes a contribution that is especially insightful and additive, the leader may jump in and ensure that the train of thought is allowed to evolve.

## Connecting to Larger Purposes

Yet another challenge for the collaborative leader is to connect group discussions to the school's larger purposes. The good news is that there is no shortage of larger purposes—development of Jewish identity, connection to the State of Israel, exhibiting and internalizing Jewish values, growing as thinkers, learning to work as a member of a team, tapping creativity, etc. But it's not a simple matter to have a group pause and recognize the relationship of its work to one or more of these larger purposes. Not all people want to be reflective. Faced with potential resistance, the leader can easily rationalize

that the connection to a larger purpose of the school is obvious, leaving no need to mention it. Indeed, it should be mentioned. Bringing forth big ideas solidifies a group's work, creates a sense of cohesiveness in a school, and enhances overall respect for the leader.

## Holding the Key

While collaborative leadership is a promising option in many situations, there are times when a more directive leadership approach is clearly necessary (in crisis situations; with sensitive personnel issues; when parent or community interface is delicate), and there is a certain amount of directive leadership that provides comfort to members of a faculty and administration. More often than not, it's up to the leader to choose a directive or collaborative approach. This choice, made wisely over time, is undoubtedly a key factor in a leader's success. There may be some who came to one of these decisions for the first time with extraordinary prescience, but for most, navigating these waters comes with time and experience. And trial and error. Having developed the capacity to proceed with informed and sound judgment, despite potential difficulties, the leader's actions are sure to benefit the school, the community and our world.





ERICA ROTHBLUM  
YECHIEL HOFFMAN

# A Case Study

## in School and Synagogue Community Building

Pressman Academy is a day school housed within a synagogue, Temple Beth Am, in Los Angeles. Like other Jewish day schools, Pressman must first meet all of the requirements and expectations of a school positioned within the independent school market. Additionally, the school is expected to meet the needs of the host institution. Because Pressman Academy serves nearly 90% of the community's children, the day school has proven a critical source of growth for Temple Beth Am, drawing many families to the synagogue that otherwise would not have affiliated with a synagogue or would have affiliated with other synagogues and other denominations. Consequently, the synagogue relies upon the school to funnel families into the larger synagogue community and support their continued engagement. Likewise, the school depends on the synagogue to provide Jewish engagement opportunities for the students and their families. This article explores some of the tensions implicit in this relationship and suggests ways to enhance the collaboration to better serve the larger community.

## School and Synagogue Interests and Priorities: The Tension

### School

Pressman Academy has four main priorities. First, it is responsible for the education of its students, guided by state and national standards, and for which the school must ultimately answer to parents who are paying for that education. Second, the school aims to form a partnership with parents in caring for their children. This plays out both as “customer service,” with the school working to please its parents, as well as parent engagement, which is done to support the school’s work. Third, the school is accountable to the state for its governance, including filing the board’s bylaws and complying with 501(c)(3) regulations. Fourth, the school must adhere to financial, legal and HR rules. In this regard, the school functions as an arm of the synagogue, with Temple Beth Am’s board of trustees holding ultimate fiduciary responsibility for the school.

In addition to these priorities similar to any other day school, Pressman Academy is also responsible for integrating its family population into the larger synagogue community. The synagogue expects that its day school will channel school families into its membership and programming, allowing the synagogue to grow and to nurture lifelong relationships between school parents and synagogue.

### Synagogue

Temple Beth Am shares some of the responsibilities and priorities as the school. It is accountable for governance, legal, financial and HR compliance, and there is a lot of natural overlap and collaboration. The school and synagogue share a resource and development department, an accounting department, HR resources and legal counsel. However, the synagogue’s main

priority remains ensuring that adult members have ample opportunities for Jewish engagement, primarily through ritual services, pastoral care, Israel missions, community service and adult learning. Synagogue leaders also work to build and maintain relationships that will ensure members remain in the community even after families see their children age out of schooling. In addition to these demands, the school expects the synagogue to provide leadership and continuous support for its growth and health along with reasonable autonomy for its educational efforts.

### The Overlap

The school and the synagogue share a desire to integrate families into the larger community, for both institutional sustainability and the long-term sustainability of the Jewish people. For the school, having children and families participate in the synagogue helps them draw connections between Jewish learning and practice, study and community. For the synagogue, encouraging day school families to take part fulfills its larger mission of Jewish engagement. Temple Beth Am often runs programs for children designed to attract parent participation as well.

While both seek to run programming for families and children outside of regular school hours, the primary audience differs, with the school catering to children and the synagogue to adults. Because the school and synagogue hold differing priorities, tension sometimes arises in their approaches to finding ways to integrate families, despite overlapping aims. Herein lies the challenge that schools face when trying to promote communal engagement from within a larger synagogue infrastructure. How can school leadership meet the needs of the larger organization’s interests in their parent community, while also fostering the best opportunities for their student community?

The following fictionalized scenario, based loosely on real events, illustrates this kind of situation.

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## A Case Study of these Priorities: Shabbat Morning

Recognizing that families were looking to engage on Shabbat with their school community, the head of school, Peg, tasked the school rabbi, Rabbi Goldberg, to create a twice-a-year Shabbat morning experience. Teachers prepared their students to lead different parts of the service, school staff and parents came together with children on Shabbat morning, and the service was followed by a celebratory kiddush.

As the program evolved, the number of families in attendance grew, with close to 200 people attending on a Shabbat morning. Many of the 200 were people who did not necessarily attend the other 50 Shabbatot a year in the synagogue but came specifically for this school Shabbat program.

Recognizing the program as a success, the synagogue leadership wondered if there were a way to capitalize on the program's popularity to create connections with the synagogue clergy and to encourage more active participation on other

Shabbatot. The synagogue asked its cantor, Cantor Jennings, to take on this project on behalf of the synagogue's clergy.

The head of school set up a meeting with Rabbi Goldberg and Cantor Jennings.

Cantor Jennings began the meeting, "The Shabbat program is incredible. There is a lot of potential in helping the families bridge into the synagogue and feel a connection to the larger community."

"What do you have in mind?" Peg asked. "How do you imagine doing this?"

"I would love to come to the Shabbat services and have a role," the cantor responded. "I think I could give the parents a taste of what Shabbat is like in this community. And hopefully bond with some people to get them to come back."

"Wonderful," Rabbi Goldberg responded. "We would love to have you. What kind of role were you imagining?"

"I was thinking I could lead part of the service, teach some of the prayers and lead some music that would inspire the adults in the room. The students know so much, and many of the parents sit passively like they are watching a show. I think I could help them feel involved. Then they would know the prayers and our tunes—it could be a beautiful connection!"

Rabbi Goldberg began to shift in his chair. "I love the idea," he replied, "but I am not sure how to work this piece in. The school is trying to find opportunities for the students to bring their prayer education into an authentic Shabbat service, and our students lead the entire morning. Our drash is given by the 7th graders, as part of their b'nei mitzvah training. And we want the parents to be there, so there is an authentic kahal to experience this service and the children's leadership, even if it is a little messy at times."

## Strengthening Collaboration

This story illustrates the tensions present in the school-synagogue relationship, even when the best intentions for cooperation are present. The school's priority here is to educate its students and, only secondarily, to engage parents; the synagogue tries to shape this experience toward the adults by introducing them to its Shabbat morning services. Through our own similar experiences, we developed core practices to recommend how schools and synagogues (and truly any partnership) can collaborate effectively to best serve their larger community.

**Strong lay leadership.** Every parent in the school is also a member of the synagogue, and they bear the shared interest and investment in both entities. Our lay leaders serve as viable mediators between the staff leadership of both the school and synagogue. Their interest in the health of both parts of the institution positions them to push towards a vision of collaboration and cooperation. In this case, the lay leadership of the synagogue and the school can question, challenge and gather together the people needed to encourage the staff to seek compromise. As one lay leader recently told us, "My only goal is to support you and make you successful in your jobs." Their investment in the particulars of the program can be secondary to helping the larger institution thrive.

**Relationship building.** Human connection truly drives partnership deeper than pragmatic dependencies. Whether between senior leadership, principals and program directors, or teachers and office staff, direct and personal relationships motivate our staff to support each other and compromise self-interest for the needs of the institution. Being in a relationship fosters a willingness to forgive easily and appreciate others' motivations. In this case, a personal and meaningful relationship between Cantor Jennings and Rabbi Goldberg would enable them to both trust each other and also be more willing to give each other the benefit of the doubt, rather than retreating to protect one's territory.

**Strengths-based appreciation.** In a synagogue and in a school, each part of the institution brings expertise from which the other can draw. In considering the extent to which family programs meet the needs of the children or the adults, rather than competing for their own priorities, it is crucial that the school and the synagogue form a collaboration. When developing family programming, the school can benefit from the synagogue's expertise in reaching adults, while the synagogue can tap into the school's deep understanding of young people, as well as its experience in marketing and

recruitment. In this case, the school would be wise to engage Cantor Jennings in how to craft a meaningful experience for parents.

**Collective investment.** It's not enough for the two of us, as leaders in the organization, to believe in collaboration and to model it. We also need to cultivate a culture among our departments' leadership and staff of a holistic community and learning environment. By bringing our entire staff and lay leadership into the vision, we can ensure that the promise of a fully integrated community lives on. In this case, Rabbi Goldberg and Cantor Jennings need to certify that their colleagues are invested in collaboration for the greater good.

**Clarity and advanced planning.** We have found it crucial to share the projects, programs and initiatives we are undertaking. This occurs within senior leadership meetings, on the lay level in board and committee meetings, and in presentations at our department staff meetings. This effort to communicate clearly depends upon planning, sharing an extensive timeline, and building in checkpoints that allow for reflection and feedback on the process. In the case, the school's advanced planning of the Shabbat morning project would give it time to communicate plans for the design of the program with Cantor Jennings, so that suggested additions and changes would not trigger Rabbi Goldberg's concern over altering established plans.

**Transparency about tension and safe spaces.** As a staff, we have sat down to name what each part of the institution "owns" and in what spaces we share ownership. For example, Pressman Academy "owns" the school building and Temple Beth Am "owns" the rabbi suite, so neither has to ask the other for permission to schedule their own spaces or do maintenance in them. In other spaces, both institutions can lay claim to their use. By remaining open and authentic about areas of tension, we are more easily able to resolve issues. In the case above, tension arose because the Shabbat program fell within overlapping ownership of the school and synagogue. When Rabbi Goldberg and Cantor Jennings can openly share the stake they have in the program, they will more openly be able to find a solution.

While we have not solved all of the challenges inherent in a day school being situated inside a larger organization with conflicting organizational priorities, we recognize that our collaboration offers opportunities to better serve the Jewish community. When we silo our efforts, our commitments and our resources, we lose sight of the overall purposes and goals of the Jewish organizational endeavor. By harnessing the resources, talents and passions of both a synagogue and a school, we multiply the points of connections we can cultivate and deepen the relationships that exist across communal life.



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RACHEL KALIKOW

# Changing Mindsets

## Can Building the Admissions Funnel Be an Opportunity for Community Partnership?

My position, director of community outreach and partnerships, is the result of a commitment to change how we think about admissions and about the role of our school in the Jewish ecosystem. With it, our school aims to change communal behaviors and create models for institutional collaboration that will impact how people view Jewish high school.

Five years ago, Gann Academy, a pluralistic Jewish high school in suburban Boston, took a look at its demographics. Roughly 75% of its students came from one of six nearby K-8 day schools (one has since closed). When not spending time with prospective families who came through the school's doors, Gann's admissions officers were rightly cultivating relationships with the K-8 Jewish day schools. However, as we know from trends around the country, Gann could only expect to enroll a percentage of those 8th grade graduates. Clearly, the school needed to look at students who came through other channels. How did the 25% of Gann's students who hadn't been in day schools end up walking through Gann's doors? And how could we reach more of them?

We needed a new strategy that would enable us to broaden the top of the admissions funnel. This process is fundamentally different from traditional admissions work, which is focused on stewarding families already in the funnel.

Thanks to support from the Ruderman Family Foundation, Gann created a part-time recruitment and outreach coordinator position. I was hired to create and implement a strategy for introducing more potential families to the school, and was fortunate to work with a thought partner, a parent whose older daughter matriculated at Gann after attending public school. We realized that the initial focus of our work had to be relationship-building. Too many people in the Jewish community hadn't heard of Gann, and others thought it was a school for a particular type of kid and therefore "not for my kid." We needed to change mindsets.

Looking at our demographics, we identified key synagogues that had small clusters of students already at Gann. We quickly assembled a team of parent ambassadors to serve as connectors to these synagogue communities, and began to build our strategy around outreach to these communities.

In conversations with parents who had joined Gann from outside of the day school community as well as with some synagogue leaders, we learned about some of the key challenges and questions we needed to address as we built relationships with synagogues.

Synagogues are concerned about membership retention. Why would a synagogue want to encourage children to attend a pluralistic Jewish high school that then draws their children (and possibly parents) to another Jewish space?

Other synagogues were concerned about appearing to promote day school. Would parents who had not chosen day school be offended with a presentation about Gann to them or their teens?

Why would families want to look at Gann when they lived in communities with top public schools or competitive independent schools? Why was the Jewish high school relevant?

Why would families look at Gann if they hadn't already chosen day school for their children?

The language that Gann uses may not be uniformly familiar to everyone in a diverse Jewish community. For example, we proudly call ourselves a "pluralistic" high school, but many people did not understand what that meant.

Understanding some of the questions and concerns from the community enabled us to realize that we needed to do more than recruitment. We needed to build on and respond to the conversations to move towards partnership. As a pluralistic high school, Gann has been in ongoing conversation with Jewish community leaders throughout our 18-year history. Just as synagogues and other Jewish organizations in our community are deepening the engagement of the Jewish community, present and future, so Gann Academy is providing an education that will deepen the Jewish identity of teens who are preparing to enter the world as adults. Wouldn't everyone in the community benefit if our organizations were in conversation? In order to do that, we needed to break down the learned behavior that keeps most of our institutions siloed and move toward a model of institutional collaboration. The position shifted from "recruitment and outreach" to "community outreach and partnerships." We were moving from asking for lists of middle school students to exploring how our institutions could support each other. "Partnership" meant building a relationship, identifying what resources we might have to share, and further supporting each other. Our hypothesis was that by building these partnerships, we would raise Gann's profile in the community, increase Jewish synagogue leaders' familiarity with the school, and normalize Gann as a high school option for more families.

The ability to approach this work from a point of partnership attracted the attention of our Federation, so that, as the initial grant wound down, we received support from Combined Jewish Philanthropies, whose donors were interested in creative efforts to attract a greater diversity of students to day school.

Once we began to see ourselves as a communal resource, we identified what we might offer synagogues. This included an ideological commitment to working to strengthen our community; thought leaders in Jewish studies, pedagogy and teen development who might be available to speak publicly; a community of nearly 300 Jewishly engaged students who come from more than 40 towns throughout the Greater Boston area; and a modern building on a beautiful campus with a theater, large gym and sports fields.

We brought synagogue leadership—board and professional—to visit Gann. At a minimum, each visit included a tour, a meeting with our head of school, and an opportunity to speak with one or two students who were members of their synagogue. These visits gave them a sense of the mission of the school and a feel for the environment.

Next, parent ambassadors and I went to the synagogues. We learned about their community. Yes, it was clear that we wanted to raise Gann's profile in their synagogue; we brought brochures for them

to share. But we also discussed our work more broadly and explained what resources we had to share. We didn't expect every Jewish student at each of these synagogues to enroll at Gann, but we wanted more families to explore Gann. We weren't there just to get names—we were there to build a relationship.

Some synagogue staff readily shared that they had no idea which of their members attended Gann. They loved visiting and seeing their teens there, and soon began sending professional leadership to have lunch with their teens periodically during the year. This simple action provided an opportunity for youth engagement staff to build or strengthen relationships with some of their teens at Gann. It also brought the staff into our building, which increased their comfort and familiarity with us, and kept us in conversation with them.

As our conversations continued to explore what resources we might have to offer, we found that synagogues were looking for thought leaders to speak to their communities. This has opened up opportunities ranging from faculty teaching in adult education programming, to college counselors participating on panels for teens and parents, to our head of school speaking regularly on teen engagement, creating an authentic high school experience, community, inclusion, character development, leadership and more.

Synagogue leadership now see more opportunities to use our space. A large Reform synagogue has begun to present their high school play annually in Gann's theater; for at least two evenings, 200 people are walking through our building to see their child or friend perform. Youth groups have rented our gym for communitywide teen basketball tournaments. Regional and local youth groups have held shabbatonim at Gann, bringing as many as 300 teens into the building.

Additional partnership opportunities have built upon our desire to play a greater role in the local Jewish ecosystem. Gann has been a co-sponsor at the Boston Jewish Film Festival, with a teacher or student moderating a conversation at one film annually. The school has become a founding partner in the newly launched Jewish Teen Foundation of Greater Boston, a teen philanthropy program affiliated with the Jewish Teen Funders Network. Working in collaboration with other Boston institutions, we staff one of two teen boards, which include students from throughout the Boston area. This provides an opportunity for Gann teens and other teens to work together to build a philanthropic foundation, while giving us another opportunity to connect to synagogues and their families. Our head of school reconstituted a Pluralism Advisory Committee, which brings together Boston-area clergy from synagogues across denominations to discuss how questions regarding Jewish practice and education might be

addressed at a pluralistic school. In addition, our head of school currently serves as the scholar-in-residence for a yearlong Federation leadership development program.

These partnerships have borne fruit in an increased willingness by the synagogues to promote Gann. For example, the Reform rabbi of a local congregation has written directly to his families to encourage them to explore Gann and to come hear our head of school when he speaks. Several Reform and Conservative rabbis have begun to send out personalized emails to their eighth grade families encouraging them to attend Gann's Open House. Synagogues are more willing to share information on Gann's activities. Thanks to the direct relationships with synagogue staff, when students and families contact their synagogue youth engagement staff to ask about Gann, the staff can now talk from direct experience. Over the past four years, applications from the synagogues with whom we've worked closely have increased nearly threefold.

It takes a few years to see this growth. Nor have we been successful in every community. In some cases, those questions and challenges identified in the beginning of this article override the promise of building a partnership. Our success has been strongest when our parents are also leaders in their synagogue communities, when synagogue leadership believes that by working together we each become stronger and contribute to a more robust Jewish community, and when our students can also be motivated to talk to the synagogues and to their friends.

We are in the midst of a marathon, not a sprint. We need to engage more parents so that we may deepen our relationship with more synagogue communities and continue to explore opportunities for partnership beyond synagogues. We are formalizing a student ambassador program so that students see this as part of their role. We will explore conversations with additional organizations in the Jewish community to learn about their needs and explore what role we might play.

The key to success lies in conceiving the day school as a resource, thought leader and connector in the community. The enrollment department then is empowered to play a much larger role. It no longer needs to limit the focus of recruitment efforts to the addition of prospective names in the database. Instead, it becomes the hub for creating partnerships with local Jewish institutions. At Gann, this work started by identifying a handful of thriving synagogues with parent ambassadors. By creating a mindset of plenty rather than scarcity, our school has been able to engage parents as ambassadors, to foster relationships with synagogues, and, in so doing, to deepen the exposure that more families have to our high school.

STUDENT  
COLLABORATION  
IN OUR SCHOOLS



# Shifting Paradigms for Student Collaboration

At Fuchs Mizrahi's Stark High School, deep, extended collaboration, through which students bring their individual talents together to produce and create meaningful work, has replaced older ways of learning. Some examples:

- Students working together to write, illustrate and publish children's storybooks on the Cold War era in their tenth grade humanities class.
- Groups preparing for their schoolwide Hebrew exhibition assembling artifacts, research and group learning journals that track the development of various parts of Israeli culture like cuisine, fashion or healthcare.
- Chavrutot in the Beit Midrash working to apply their understanding of complex texts in Gemara or Tanakh to producing videos, skits or posters that express their understanding of underlying essential questions.
- Jewish history students participating in a Chasidim vs. Mitnagdim mini-color war where they worked in teams to campaign and represent their ideologies in creative ways.

The shift to more student-centered learning was not a function of one or two individual workshops or a few teachers inspired by a conference. It has been, instead, the product of a process we have engaged in to shift the paradigms of teaching and learning in high school. To do this, we needed to re-examine some of the basic assumptions about how a dual-curriculum Jewish day school operates. So far, our efforts have focused on three major areas that we consider critical to creating a lasting paradigm shift.

## Structures

Meaningful collaboration where students develop ideas, refine them and create something together requires significant time. We felt that continuing to run students through a day of eight or nine different classes that met for 40 minutes each prevented teachers from designing and students from engaging in the type of learning we envisioned. Therefore, we moved to a blocked schedule for most classes and integrated some subjects together (i.e., English and history became co-taught

humanities courses, Chumash and Navi became one Tanakh course). This helped us move the number of courses students were taking in a given semester from nine to six and build days for students where they could spend more time focused on fewer subjects.

## Relationships

Significant educational research (especially from the Making Caring Common project at Harvard) has highlighted the critical role a caring community and relationships play in developing an environment of trust and collaboration. We spent a year working with teachers on how they can communicate and provide feedback in ways that better convey a sense of care and concern for students. This year, we also began an advisory program where students meet for two periods a week with a teacher who can check in with their progress and facilitate conversations about social-emotional and academic issues.

## Faculty Collaboration

For teachers to design learning in ways that encourage collaboration, they needed opportunities to collaborate in their own learning. Teacher PD, therefore, shifted to more collaborative planning time. Tanakh teachers, for example, worked in pairs to design units together. Multidisciplinary teams of teachers participated in regular meetings where they followed a protocol to collaboratively refine their plans for upcoming projects. During designated PD days, teachers shared successes with each other and collaborated to design and refine new strategies.

Collaboration, therefore, serves as both the trigger and result of our continued efforts to enhance the meaning, depth and engagement of students in learning at Fuchs Mizrahi. Of course, the vision for our efforts itself emerged and continues to develop from a collaborative effort between lay leadership, faculty, the head of school and high school leadership team. Combining our collective understanding of student needs, development, curriculum and pedagogy with our passion for continued growth and improvement has helped this new initiative quickly move from "some new ideas and initiatives" to, more simply, "the way we do things."



JON BEN-ASHER

Head of School, Tucson Hebrew  
Academy, Tucson

## Partnership2Gether: Bridging the Gap between America and Israel

“It’s a game changer,” says Oshrat Barel, Israel’s Tucson community *shlichah* (cultural ambassador), as she muses about our Partnership2Gether program. “It brings in both the local *and* Israeli community. It enhances the academic program. It brings Israel to the classroom. It personalizes Israel. It’s not some abstract concept of Israel on the map... It’s their teachers, their students. It’s the lives and places of the people there.”

Partnership2Gether is a collaboration bringing together in a profound way the communities of Tucson and its partnership region, the city of Kiryat Melachi and the municipalities of Chof Ashkelon. From preschoolers to seniors, Tucsonans from all walks of Jewish life connect with their counterparts via a range of programming. Across Tucson’s Jewish agencies and synagogues, P2G unites the Jewish community here and bridges the physical and cultural distance between America and Israel.

At the Tucson Hebrew Academy, the P2G school twinning program takes on a powerful significance. From ages 5 to 14, students connect by mail and Internet with their peers in Shikma, the region’s main public school. In eighth grade, THA students travel to Israel and meet their friends in person.

As with all great programs, planning is key. Oshrat and her team help get us organized. After goals are set, teachers at the two schools are identified for the program. Internal planning at both schools takes place, and the teachers collaborate together between schools via email, Skype and WhatsApp. Although the time difference is a challenge, technology provides the solution to communications between continents. Once the relationship is established between teachers overseas, it often continues into the next year and the collaboration builds and builds.

The students collaborate on a variety of activities during the school year. These include pencil and paper writing, drawing pictures and sharing photographs, and arts and crafts projects, which are literally transported back and forth between Israel and Tucson, by visitors or mail. Classes swap stories of themselves, and relationships begin to form. Student work from

Israel is posted in Tucson, and vice versa. Thus, the new friends develop a tangible presence in each other’s classrooms.

Literature is another vehicle that connects participants. A shared text, *The Same Moon*, is read in paired classrooms, helping students understand that even though Israel is far away, we share many things in common. Students participate in activities together through Skype, including Jewish rituals such as menorah lighting. The same students whose art, stories and pictures hang in our classrooms come to life over the Internet. Younger students sing together, while older students discuss academic topics and learn about each other’s lives.

Students have responded the most to the personal relationships that are established through the program. Group experiences are powerful as well, but as students begin to engage directly with individuals, real friendships begin to emerge. Supporting Israel is one of our school’s six core values. Israel and Israelis come to life as relationships are built, experiences are shared and friendships are made; this program broadens and deepens the appreciation, understanding and support of Israel, and has a huge impact on this essential goal.

It all comes together when eighth graders finally meet in person. Our 24-hour visit with our partner school seems to pass in an instant, as the students work, learn and have fun together. Outdoors course training, making personal pizzas, sleeping at their friend’s homes, putting up tiles at the Peace Wall and digging together at an archeological site—they cannot get enough. We are greeted like family, and we feel like family together. When we part ways, tears flow and laughter bellows as Israeli students pretend to sneak on the bus. Throughout the rest of the trip the students are in constant touch, and I know those conversations continue and will for many years to come.

The school year is underway, and it’s game on for P2G! I yearn to return in May, see how my counterpart Moti is doing and watch this year’s graduates fall head-over-heels in love with Israel and forge connections with their friends in this faraway land that is so close to our hearts and souls. Together, we are enriched both as individual Jews and a collective community, here and abroad.

# Muslim-Jewish Middle School Encounters: A Beginning

**REBECCA BERGER**

Jewish Studies Teacher,  
Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles

For the past five years, Sinai Akiba Academy, an ECC-eighth grade day school in Los Angeles, has partnered with New Horizon School, a K-8 Muslim day school, for two full days of cross-cultural exchange. Before launching the Day School Exchange in 2011, with the support of a consultant from NewGround: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change, we spent a full school year visioning and laying the groundwork for what this encounter might look like. The heads of school from New Horizon School and Sinai Akiba Academy as well as teachers from each school met to set joint goals for the program. Our specific goals were to learn about and present our own history and religious tradition to others, to understand the ethnic and religious diversity in the Los Angeles community, and to strengthen ties between our local Muslim and Jewish communities. In these meetings between our schools, we also explicitly stated that we would not talk about Israel/Palestine or current events with our students. Given that our students are 13 and 14 and that they have so short a time frame for interaction, the schools agreed that forging positive relationships among students would be our top priority.

The need for such an exchange became apparent to me in one moment I will never forget. As a teacher of Jewish history, I strive to make each lesson relevant to my students and to instill in my students a sense of empathy. Despite my best effort to teach the importance of not stereotyping, when one of my students announced that “Muslims are terrorists,” I realized that nothing I could do or say in my classroom would change this teen’s mind. My student needed a catalyst to change his thinking—an opportunity to meet Muslim teens.

Before meeting face to face, Muslim and Jewish “buddies” exchange three moderated emails, responding

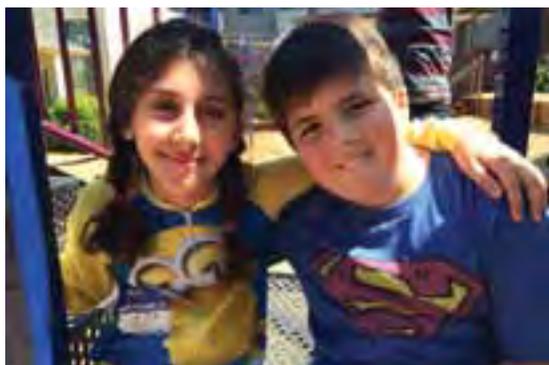
to prompts such as “Share about the meaning of your name,” and “What holidays are most meaningful to you and why?” Then the seventh and eighth grade New Horizon students spend a day at Sinai Akiba Academy, and a month later, students from Sinai Akiba Academy spend a day at New Horizon School. With support from Facing History and Ourselves, teachers from both schools co-create the curriculum for the two-day exchange. Students explore essential questions together: “What does it mean to pursue justice?” “What does it mean to be a Muslim/Jewish American?” Each day is filled with games, art, text study, service opportunities, prayer and reflection.

My students’ reflections suggest that the Day School Exchange does, indeed, have an impact. One of my students wrote, “When we were with the kids from New Horizon I almost forgot that they weren’t Jewish. We were all so similar.” Another student shared, “This experience has affected me because now I feel like giving more and making a difference in the world. I also feel like making friends with people outside of my community.” A third student remarked, “[The exchange] made me change my views on Islam.”

The majority of our students and parent body support the Day School Exchange. One parent wrote in a Facebook comment that this exchange was the highlight of her child’s experience at Sinai Akiba. Despite strong support from our parent body overall, there are still some who are wary of this project. Though we may not reach every child in our middle school, hopefully the impact we are having will have a ripple effect. As one student wrote, “If the next generation of Jews and Muslims—my generation—can begin a dialogue, then maybe we can work to find a solution. This is a beginning.”



## Cross-Grade Student Collaboration in Service Learning



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Director of Jewish Life,  
Contra Costa Jewish Day School, Lafayette,  
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**TORI MORTON**

General Studies Teacher, formerly at  
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Service learning provides unique opportunities for authentic collaboration. At Contra Costa Jewish Day School, our schoolwide service learning program empowers each grade to work for a full year with a Jewish value. Our third grade theme is “Honoring People with Special Needs.” A crucial component of this unit involves monthly playdates in which our students partner with students with special needs at a local school.

An opportunity for student collaboration arose during our search for experts in the community who could speak to our third graders about being good play buddies for children with special needs before our first visit to our partnering school. We realized that we had student experts next door, in the fourth grade, who had completed this unit the previous year and were eager to reflect on their experiences with an authentic audience. They were excited to lead younger students in developing a meaningful relationship with a student with special needs.

We put aside class time for the fourth graders to meet one-on-one with the third graders to share their successes and advice. For instance, one fourth grader warned a third grader that his buddy might cry, as he could be overwhelmed when meeting new people, but that he would get more comfortable over time. Another fourth grader advised us that when we met our buddies we should walk into the classroom quietly, because loud voices can overwhelm people with sensitivity to sound. A third student advised that we should try to say things in a positive way, such as “let’s go over here” to redirect our buddy’s attention, instead of saying “no.”

After these meetings, our third graders were noticeably less nervous about their first encounter with their buddies than our previous classes had been after receiving guidance only from adult experts. Additionally, the fourth graders made themselves available to check in with the third graders at recess throughout

the year to offer suggestions and insights into connecting with their buddies. The third graders also received valuable input from the older class about an event they organized for their buddies at the end of the school year. The fourth graders offered advice based on their experience and made suggestions for rethinking specific details.

We believe that student collaboration enhanced our service learning project and our school community in the following ways:

- empowering student leaders to make valuable contributions by passing on their own experiences.
- creating a comfortable environment in which younger students are able to learn from a near peer and ask questions that they may not feel comfortable asking an adult.
- supporting kids' natural desire to share work that they're proud of.
- strengthening cross-grade-level friendships and community through shared experience.
- engaging students' shared emotional connection to this unit, making it personal and memorable on an individual and community level.

In Pirkei Avot 2.2, we are taught that study should accompany work and that the work that we do, as a community, should be “for the sake of Heaven.” Working together toward a higher goal fuels and unifies our school community while providing an effective vehicle for transformative collaboration. Time and again, students, parents and teachers remember their participation in this program as the most meaningful part of their school year experience.

# Camp at School Day

In April 2016, Krieger Schechter Day School (KSDS) and The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore's Center for Jewish Camping (CJC) partnered with five overnight camps, hosting the first annual Camp@School Day. (School staff captured this day on video: [tinyurl.com/jboeext](http://tinyurl.com/jboeext).) KSDS students and faculty were introduced to a variety of local area Jewish overnight camps as they participated in engaging, meaningful and informal Jewish educational experiences. Our ambitious goals for the program went well beyond a fun break from classroom learning: having camp educators model experiential teaching for faculty; brand and name recognition of the camps by our students and families as they choose overnight camp for themselves; collaboration between camp and school on the senior administrative level that fosters long-term partnerships and trust that will impact future programming, fundraising and possible shared staffing models.

The idea for the program originated from four KSDS parents, all of whom also work year-round at local area camps: Alicia Berlin, director of Camp Louise; Rabbi Miriam Burg, director of Jewish life at Capital Camps; Jonah Geller, executive director of Capital Camps, and Jodi Wahlberg, recruiter at Camp Ramah in the Poconos. With the support of KSDS, other local camps and the CJC, we jointly developed the vision for the day and this unique collaboration took place.

The KSDS administration took the lead in planning this program, and several teachers were involved on the planning committee. The rest of the faculty was given responsibilities. Each camp designed a station and an age-appropriate activity related to a symbol on the seder plate, since this program took place right before Passover break.

B'nai B'rith Perlman Camp wanted to create a sense of what it meant to be a slave in Egypt (charoset). They designed relay races and activities requiring students to complete a near impossible task in a short timeframe, first individually and then working together collaboratively.

Camps Airy and Louise sought to capture the bitterness that the Israelites experienced in Egypt and the bitterness in today's world (maror). With the help of Jewish Volunteer Connection, they arranged a mitzvah project for Sarah's Hope, a

shelter for homeless women who are pregnant or have young children. Students flipped bitterness into love, creating posters and decorative bags filled with sweet treats for the shelter's residents.

Camp Ramah in the Poconos creatively illustrated the symbolism of the beitzah through an egg race game. Students built a path to the Temple, strategized how to overcome obstacles on the journey, and delivered the unblemished ritual sacrifice to the Temple.

Capital Camps portrayed the renewal and hope (karpas) of springtime by having students create their own wishes and dreams garden, decorating a flower with a picture and sentence about their wishes and vision for the future. They took their flowers and created a "wishes and dream" garden in their classrooms.

Habonim Dror Camp Moshava used an orange at their station to symbolize inclusiveness. Students decorated a plate as an orange and wrote a sentence about how they make everyone in their community feel welcome.

The day included a camp-style lunch (yes, we served bug juice) in the KSDS courtyard served by camp directors, a camp-inspired Birkat

HaMazon led by Camps Airy and Louise staff using their camp melodies and a recess period in which each camp led a sports activity with that "only at camp" feel.

After the program, we received much positive feedback from parents, students, faculty and camp staff. KSDS faculty were impressed by the learning that took place throughout the camp activities, and remarked on the thought and depth that went into their planning. Camp staff appreciated the time they had to spend with students, and the ability to use their imagination to develop a program that mirrored their camp philosophies and values.

All partners determined that collaboration between Jewish camp and Jewish day schools is significant and should be continued. Currently, a third of eligible KSDS students attend a Jewish overnight camp. In the 2016-2017 school year, KSDS will partner with The Associated's Center for Jewish Camping more frequently so "camps" can be offered to students on days when school is not in session. KSDS and area camps are hopeful that these types of partnership opportunities will result in an increase in camper enrollment and vibrant, experiential, educational experiences for youth year-round.



ELAINE KAPLAN

Assistant Principal,  
Rockwern Academy, Cincinnati

## All-School Read



Our school's annual All-School Read program engenders collaboration both within the school and beyond. Every year, a committee of teachers and staff at Rockwern chooses a single book, author or theme for every class, preschool through eighth grade. Program goals include building community and enriching our school culture through shared knowledge and experiences, encouraging cross-disciplinary and cross-grade projects, and supporting outreach and service learning.

We strengthen our own community through reading together and sharing class projects. When older children read the chosen book to younger children, the shared text offers common ground on which to build relationships. More complex endeavors cross disciplines. One such project, when our topic was Kavod/respect, led fifth and sixth graders to study several well-known Jewish folktales in Judaic studies class. After discussing how each tale demonstrated the theme, the students rewrote stories as puppet show scripts in language arts class, designed puppets and scenery in art, and finally, performed the show for our preschool and the Jewish Community Center. Simultaneously, our preschoolers focused on respect for the environment and created a rainbow mural out of recycled materials, which they presented to the older students.

In another component of the All-School Read, students collaborate with peers from another school to read and study the same books. When we read *Three Cups of Tea*, about a mountaineer who worked with Pakistani villagers to build schools, mostly for girls, we worked with a local Muslim school to learn more about the culture we encountered in the book. We also

made a joint donation to Pennies for Peace and performed in a "peace choir" as part of Cincinnati's Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration.

Another year, we studied the works of Kathryn Lasky, a prolific author who has written books for everyone from toddlers through adults, in genres ranging from the Holocaust to fantasy. During that year, we collaborated with the Joseph and Florence Mandel Jewish Day School in Cleveland. Using both a communal website and Skype, we shared our thoughts and displayed creative projects. A highlight was when the author herself answered online questions from students at both schools.

This year's theme is Community. We have chosen two texts: *The Rhino Who Swallowed a Storm*, by Levar Burton and Susan Bernardo, and *Last Stop on Market Street*, by Matt de la Peña. We will collaborate with a local public school, Hays-Porter Elementary, and the architecture school at the University of Cincinnati. After reading the texts, our hope is to help students at both schools design, build and stock Little Free Libraries in the inner city.

The All-School Read evolves every year and always presents new opportunities. We've collaborated among ourselves and with a variety of other schools. As our students work with new friends from different grades, schools and backgrounds, the most unexpected, valuable and enduring lessons are not about their differences or about the books, but about their discovery of how much they have in common.

# KinderSTEAM: A Day School—University Collaboration

A high priority at our K-5 school has been to find ways to encourage greater STEAM learning for our students. STEAM, which stands for science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics, is an expanded version of STEM that allows for artistic creativity, human-centered design, and integration.

Since 2014, we've partnered with the STEAM club of Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). The collaboration started when a few Brown students came to our local Global Cardboard Challenge, which we held in our gym. They were excited about the creativity and enthusiasm that our students displayed in creating a myriad of cardboard inventions. One of them wrote to tell me of their club and asked about finding a way to collaborate. Always looking for partners and innovation, my answer was an immediate and resounding yes.

## Successes

For the past two years, we have had a STEAM week where the Brown and RISD club members and others come to teach our kids on a wide variety of subjects. From graduate students in applied mathematics to undergraduates in industrial design, these young student-teachers created lessons about STEAM subjects that fascinate them. Our faculty supports them in creating age-appropriate lesson plans. Our students have built pipe organs from PVC pipes and bird nests from various collected natural materials. They've learned math through card tricks, and our pre-K and kindergarten build toothbrush robots. We've had more than two dozen mini-lessons covering every grade in our school, pre-K to 5.

Not only do our elementary students learn a lot, but they think the college students are awesome, funny and inspiring. STEAM week has quickly become one of the highlights of the year. For a taste of our KinderSTEAM week in 2015, check out this video: [vimeo.com/143611780](https://vimeo.com/143611780).

## Struggles

We initially hoped to build ongoing relationships between the university students and our kids. So we built a framework to have these students come to our school once a month. But in most cases this didn't work out. University students are busy with their studies and absorbed in their social lives. We can get them to commit to a few hours in a single week, but anything more long-term becomes more difficult. There's an expression that "only two things motivate college students: credits and cash!" I would add free food to that list, so plan accordingly when setting your meetings with them.

This doesn't give enough credit to the really committed students who did

come to volunteer their time for many hours—but even our best volunteers occasionally woke up late and missed lessons, etc.

We learned not to expect continuity in leadership because different students each year volunteered to serve as the leader of the KinderSTEAM group. Both years it has been an undergraduate senior looking for leadership opportunities, but they are often busier than younger students, with the added distractions of finishing course work, submitting final projects and figuring out their post-graduation plans. So every year we have to start the process all over again with a new leaders and mostly new students as teachers.

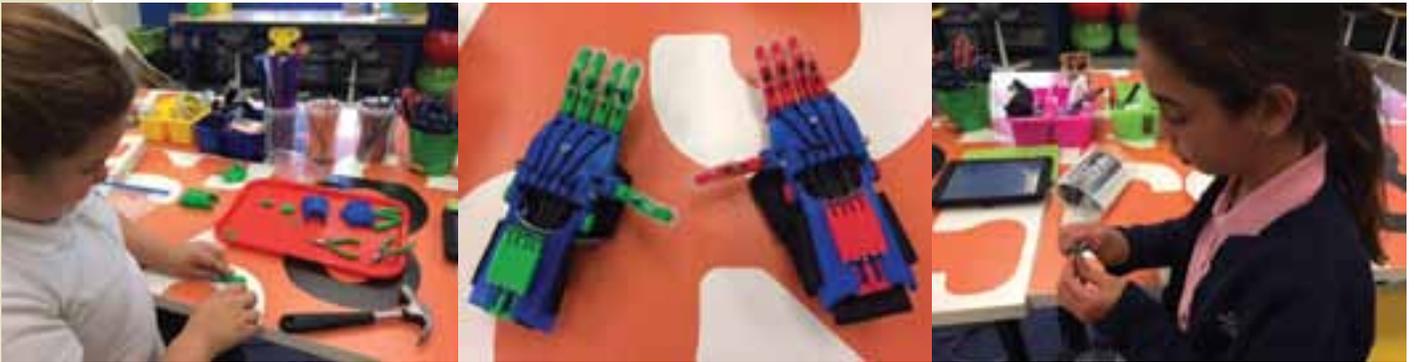
## Recommendations

- Most Jewish day schools probably have a handful of parents who are professors at local universities. Ask them how to access STEAM or other relevant campus clubs, Jewish professors in STEAM or students interested in education.
- Build a relationship with the local Hillel professionals and let them know about opportunities at your school.
- Even though most will drop out, it's still worth it to invest in relationships with students, especially young ones who will be around to fill leadership positions in later years.
- Try to find a way college students can get course credit for their work with your school. You may need a faculty advisor, or to do some extra paperwork, but it's worth the effort if it can make working with your school a priority for the students.
- Say yes to crazy ideas. Try to support rather than control the college students' passions. You may get a bad class or two, but you will gain dozens of really interesting out-of-the-box experiences.
- Be prepared for student-teachers to get lost, oversleep or cancel at the last minute. They are volunteers, after all, and as the professionals, we have to be prepared for everything—even more so with college students.

In the end, building a partnership with colleges and universities doesn't take too much. But it does require having confidence in children: that they are curious, intelligent and thoughtful, and want to succeed. If that's your primary belief about your kids, then devoting a week for them to learn in different ways, from people who are passionate about their subject, is not really a risk at all. It's an opportunity for deep learning and joy.

HANNA SHEKHTER

Director of STEM Innovation and  
Education, Brauser Maimonides  
Academy, Fort Lauderdale



## STEM Lab Fosters Collaborative Student Projects

The Philip Esformes STEM Program at our school offers students an environment to create and collaborate. A space where classroom learning comes to life, the lab has the potential to promote innovative projects that impact not only our students but the world in which they live. Our faculty members create project-based learning opportunities for their students and use the STEM lab as a resource to develop these projects. Projects can include hands-on creations (models, simulations, visual representations) as well as technological artifacts using multimedia, electronics or computer programming. Tackled in groups/teams, these projects require each child to play a role in the group for the work to be completed successfully.

As an example, last year's fifth grade class read the book *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper, the story of a girl who is unable to speak or write and relies on assistive technology that helps her communicate. After reading this book, the students participated in the Prosthetic Kids Hand Challenge ([handchallenge.com](http://handchallenge.com)), in which they attempted to design and build a prosthetic hand. (The program was created by another STEM teacher.) They came to the STEM lab several times as a class and then multiple times on their own during their lunch

break. They learned how 3D printers work and what benefits this new technology offers to our world.

The students worked together in small groups to experiment with the printer and to build the prosthetic hand piece by piece. They needed to collaborate with each student in the group taking a role. One would clean and sand the printed piece, another would prepare all of the tools and parts, and a third would put their parts together while watching tutorials provided by the Hand Challenge website. Once all the pieces were built, other groups of fifth graders took the individually built pieces (thumbs, wrist, palm) and built the final hand project. Through this project, the students used tools they did not normally use in school like screwdrivers, pliers and fishing line. These students built two prosthetic hands for children in need; they are among one hundred that have been sent to children in need in India through the Hand Challenge organization.

This project perfectly integrated Brauser Maimonides Academy's three strands of academic excellence, religious commitment and character development. Our students not only acquired knowledge, but learned new skills and used their learning to make the world a better place.

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BRUCE POWELL

# The Final Frontier

## Designing Space for Teacher Collaboration

The allocation and formation of space can be pivotal in creating a productive learning environment not only for students but also for teachers. This article describes how the design of a new faculty work space, intentionally programmed with the school's vision in mind, created the conditions that allowed an enhanced culture of collaboration and creativity to flourish.

In 2012, de Toledo High School purchased two buildings on five acres of property and had the opportunity to reconfigure the new space according to our needs. We began our thinking about the faculty area by focusing on our core values and goals: collaboration, community, networking and a beit midrash approach to learning. To those ends, we designed 2,000 square feet of open space as the core faculty area, surrounded by 1,500 square feet of private offices, work spaces and meeting rooms. In essence, the space looks like a page of Talmud with the Mishnah and Gemara center stage, and the commentaries on the outside borders. The school principal, who serves as our educational leader, has her office at one end of the space, providing an open door and easy access for all teachers.

The next step was to determine what kind of arrangement of desk space would engender the desired values. Given that the space was much longer than it was wide, certain limitations were apparent. It was decided to line the desks along all surrounding wall space and place as many as we could down the center of the room, with teachers positioned to face each other across their individual desks. We also arranged the teachers in department clusters and placed selected departments in close proximity to one another. For example, the English department is across from the Jewish studies department and next to the history and science departments. Hebrew, Spanish, French, ASL and Chinese are all in a group. And arts of all kinds are centrally located since everyone loves to integrate arts into their academic programs.



Selection of chairs was also important. They needed to be very comfortable, but most importantly, they needed to swivel and be on wheels. This makes it easy for teachers to “roll” over to another area for collaboration, or flip their chairs around to form a “campfire” setting for more collaboration and networking. The desk and chair configurations also engender ease of communication with those sitting across or behind, enabling teachers to form *beit midrash*-style dyads to discuss curriculum, recent articles or student issues, or learn Torah.

The open nature of the space, in which people can easily see everyone else at work, encourages an informal networking culture. One is never more than 100 feet from a colleague in any of the departments. An English teacher, for example, who has an idea to create a joint project with the history department, simply needs to walk over to her colleague, grab a chair and ask, “What do you think about this?” From such collaborations and easy access have emerged our unique “Museum of the American Teenager,” our Senior Capstone project, final exams written jointly by the English and Jewish studies departments, exchange of ideas on how to use technology in the classroom, and dozens of other communications and collaborations that have enhanced the learning of our students.

One unplanned outcome of the space was its power to promote a social environment among the faculty. Teachers feel comfortable simply walking over to colleagues, schmoozing about current events, asking advice about finding good child care, providing

suggestions for excellent car mechanics, offering to set up an exchange for used children’s toys, clothing and car seats, or simply making plans to meet after work for coffee or dinner. Making weekend social plans is also not uncommon. It is also a space to provide support for those who may have lost a parent, or simply need guidance about how to handle a personal situation. Bottom line: the space has helped teachers to form a strong sense of community that goes beyond their professional work. It creates trust and thereby enhances the professional relationships and creativity, as well.

Another surprising outcome of the space has been the organization of faculty Shabbat dinners. Because of the close proximity of the teachers, last year an idea was floated to join one another for Shabbat meals. The idea caught fire and teachers quickly offered to host Friday night meals for colleagues. This program is especially important for our non-Jewish colleagues who never experienced a Shabbat meal. The outcome, of course, is a deeper understanding of Jewish culture and how that culture permeates all we do in the school.

For centuries, back to the time of the Tabernacle in the desert and the First Temple in Jerusalem, architects have designed sacred spaces to enhance prayer, inspire awe and feel closeness with God. So, too, the formation and allocation of space in our schools is one of the vital ingredients that drives learning, joy, community, collaboration and a sense of wellbeing for all.

# Dialogue Across Difference

## The Power of Collaboration When Colleagues Disagree

We often think of collaboration as working together for a common purpose. But in many educational settings, we work with colleagues quite different from ourselves. We may share both space and students, but have different ideas about what we should be doing in the classroom and why we should be doing it. What happens, then, when colleagues attempt to collaborate across these differences? What does it mean to collaborate when colleagues do not share educational goals, and when even the values and assumptions underlying those goals are strikingly different?

Scholars have long agreed that collaboration is one of the core elements of good teacher professional learning. When teachers have the time and support to work together with autonomy and responsibility on topics of mutual interest, they are less isolated, more innovative and more equipped to make lasting changes to their teaching practice. While it is often most comfortable for educators to collaborate with colleagues who share a philosophical approach or pedagogical style, profound learning also occurs when educators learn to collaborate with those quite different from themselves.

For the past two years, we have been collaborating to lead a professional learning community for educators with a shared interest in Israel education. Hosted at American Jewish University, this Teaching Israel Fellowship brings together educators with a wide range of denominational, political and educational affiliations to discuss topics in Israel education, deepen their pedagogical content knowledge, and engage in critical collegiality and inquiry. By guiding our fellows through a process of collaborative learning, we have learned that collaboration among colleagues who share neither goals nor underlying values and assumptions about teaching Israel—a particularly fraught topic in nearly all schools—can be a catalyst for meaningful learning.

Talking with a colleague with whom we agree can be like talking to a mirror: we see ourselves and our ideals reflected back at us. But talking with a colleague with whom we disagree can be even more powerful. Like using a high-powered microscope, it forces us to see what is often hidden to the eye: our assumptions, our flaws and our strengths. When teachers collaborate

with those who do not share their goals, assumptions or values, they are able to better understand themselves, their students and their own role in the classroom.

### Disagreement About Goals

Mira and Jennifer both teach about Israel, but there the similarities end. Mira, a Jewish studies teacher, identifies as both a committed Zionist and an Israeli. Her politics are decidedly right-leaning, and her curriculum focuses on helping students understand the historical connection between Jews and the land of Israel. Jennifer, a social studies teacher from a day school across town, is a proud leftist and a US citizen who considers herself “openly questioning” about contemporary Zionism. Her classroom focuses on the politics and culture of contemporary Israel.

The most notable distinction between these two teachers, however, is their educational goals. Mira’s primary goal is instilling in her students a love of Israel; Jennifer’s is to expose students to multiple narratives. While both teachers were enthusiastic about the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues to achieve their goals, those goals were often in tension with each other: Jennifer views Israel education as a vehicle for fostering critical thinking about a complicated and often contentious topic, whereas Mira views it as an opportunity for instilling in students a deep and abiding love of the Jewish state.

When first given an opportunity to work with one another, Mira and Jennifer viewed each other's work as antithetical to their own. Mira believed that Jennifer's focus on multiple narratives could undermine students' commitment to the Jewish collective, while Jennifer worried that placing love at the center of Jewish education could lead to an uncritical, unreflective student body. How, they wondered, could they collaborate if they had such different goals?

Over time, however, these teachers realized that working together forced them to better articulate their own pedagogical and political positions. Instead of attempting to change one another, they used their conversations with an openly skeptical interlocutor as a way of articulating, defending and honing their own quite different approaches. In doing so, Mira and Jennifer actually helped each other develop their disparate approaches to teaching about Israel. As Mira explained to Jennifer at the end of their learning together, "You know I don't agree with you. You know we don't see eye to eye. But you have helped me become a better version of myself, and I have learned a lot from you."

This ability to listen to difference without forcing consensus or even pushing too sharply on the contours of those differences is a critically important skill for any educator who works in a diverse setting. Highlighting and naming difference without attempting to change the other can form the backbone of respectful collaboration.

## Disagreement About Foundational Values

Ezra, a high school Jewish studies teacher, teaches a unit about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For the final paper for his class, he asks students to read and analyze a series of documents offering possible solutions to the conflict—including some that he personally finds troubling or politically untenable. As part of Critical Friends work this past year, where teachers took turns presenting a challenge from their own teaching practice for the group to consider carefully, Ezra brought this assignment to his colleagues.

When the conversation moved to a consideration of why he had chosen the assignment and whether or not it worked, there was a lot of disagreement in the room. Several of Ezra's colleagues raised concerns that some of the political positions that Ezra asked his students to consider might undermine a commitment to Israel as either a Jewish or democratic state—mirroring the concerns that motivated Ezra to bring the assignment to the group in the first place. Other colleagues applauded Ezra's commitment to expose his students to a wide range of political beliefs and opinions, and to evaluate his students based on the quality—not the political content—of their arguments.

Listening to the heated disagreements of his colleagues offered Ezra a microscope to examine his own foundational values as an educator. While he had thought carefully about the assignment when he designed it alone, he had focused primarily on its efficacy as an evaluation tool. Only with a group of critical colleagues was he able to surface the at times competing assumptions and values that he was bringing to its design. Hearing his colleagues articulate their own complicated beliefs about what and how to teach helped Ezra understand the competing values within his own approach to teaching and feel comfortable maintaining that tension in his curriculum (rather than resolving it). In the end, he reaffirmed his commitment to the assignment, explaining, "I think from your feedback that this project is a worthwhile, sophisticated way of teaching Israel even with all the risks involved, and now I feel much better about assigning it."

## Creating a Collaborative Culture

In order to create the space for productive collaboration across difference, school leaders need to establish a culture in which teachers feel safe and encouraged to share their own ideas with, and offer challenges to, those

with whom they disagree. Creating such a culture requires setting clear expectations for collaborators, which we call the "ABCD's of collaboration." They make explicit our assumptions of admirable intentions, betterment, competence and difference.

**Admirable Intentions:** Fruitful collaborative partnerships across difference rest on an assumption that educators work with the good of their students at heart. Only when admirable intentions are assumed from the outset are teachers able to hear a colleague describe a lesson plan or suggest a resource that they may find personally disconcerting and engage in a productive discussion about it rather than reject it from the outset. This opens the doors for colleagues to ask questions and offer critique of others' work in the spirit of collaboration.

**Betterment:** When educators come to a collaborative group with the assumption that all members of the group hope to better themselves, their students and their work, they are more likely to push one another to grow. Without the assumption that colleagues want to develop as professionals, it becomes easy to offer only the platitudes of "good work" or "nice job." Instead, when an assumption of betterment undergirds collaborative work, educators understand that offering *only* positive feedback is unhelpful, and they become more likely to help one another articulate areas for growth and work to improve in those areas.

**Competence:** The assumption of betterment works hand in hand with an assumption of competence—the idea that educators are skilled professionals and that they seek to grow not because they are bad at what they do, but precisely because they are good at it. An assumption of competence sets the standard that asking questions, admitting confusion and surfacing doubts are signs of strength, not weakness. Educational leaders can model this by asking their own questions, revealing their own doubts and offering positive feedback when teachers share a vulnerable idea.

**Difference:** The assumption of difference makes clear that there is more than one way to be a good teacher. Teachers with radically different personalities, different pedagogical approaches and different educational philosophies can be powerful mentors, guides and role models for students. Rather than assuming that a shared passion for education and shared work in Jewish day schools means that all educators are the same, an assumption of difference honors the fact that all educators in the room bring their own beliefs, values, experiences, ideologies and skills to the work, and that the wisdom of the group enriches the collective.

Any commitment to the "ABCDs of collaboration" requires firmly, respectfully and publicly correcting any language or behaviors that stray from these expectations. Especially as educators learn or relearn how to collaborate with colleagues who are different from themselves, they may need opportunities to "redo" words and actions that miss the mark, with the support and modeling of their school leaders and facilitators.

## Under the Microscope

Collaborating with a group of like-minded colleagues—standing in front of a mirror—offers teachers a safe and comfortable space to reach out beyond the walls of their classrooms. Collaboration among colleagues who fundamentally disagree—standing under a microscope—offers teachers something else: an opportunity to articulate and sharpen their goals, assumptions and beliefs, and to carefully consider the effects of these stances on their students. It may feel more comfortable to stand in front of a mirror than under a microscope, precisely because a mirror doesn't force us to change; it just shows us what we are. But when teachers are empowered and encouraged—and explicitly given support—to put themselves under a microscope by collaborating in thoughtful ways with colleagues different from themselves, they are offered the rare gift to examine—and then improve—themselves and their practice.

# Meet your Prizmah 2017 North American Jewish Day School Conference Leaders

**The 2017 Prizmah North American Jewish Day School Conference is Prizmah's signature convening for the Jewish day school field. All Prizmah staff are engaged and committed to the work of the conference as we prepare to welcome more than 1,000 lay and professional leaders of our Jewish day schools. Our staff members featured below are taking the lead on many of the facets of the conference, but please know that everyone at Prizmah will have a hand in making this the best Jewish day school conference for each of you.**

**We all have a story to share, and we are excited to share with you the stories of the Prizmah staff. They devote a significant portion of their portfolios at Prizmah to the work of this incredible convening. On behalf of the entire Prizmah staff, we cannot wait to greet you in person in Chicago next February 2017.**



## Jim Blankstein

Prior to joining Prizmah, Jim Blankstein was the Vice President, Marketing, Communications, and Administration at PEJE. Prior to that, Jim, a seasoned multi-channel marketing professional, managed the wholesale marketing team at Bose, as well as the direct marketing and automotive marketing teams. Jim began his career in retail in New York City, graduating at the top of his class from the Macy's Executive Program. After spending 10 years in retail, he made the jump into direct marketing at Digitas. While at Digitas, Jim worked on creating acquisition, retention and loyalty programs for American Express, Delta Airline, AT&T, General Motors and The Body Shop. Jim is a member of Boston Marketing Association, the American Marketing Association and a number of local technology groups. He currently serves on the Boston University Hillel Board and is the proud father of two Jewish day school graduates.



## Ilisa Cappell

Prior to joining Prizmah, Ilisa Cappell was the Associate Executive Director at Schechter Day School Network, focused on professional leadership development

and coaching, Jewish studies and program development, and field-wide convenings. Ilisa has more than 15 years of experience in the field of Jewish day school education. She is passionate about cultivating joyful learning. Prior to her work with Schechter and Prizmah, Ilisa served as the Head of School at the El Paso Jewish Academy and is a strong advocate for Jewish day schools in small communities. Ilisa is excited to continue working closely with school leaders as a mentor in YOU Lead and is thrilled to be thinking about ways to inspire, challenge and strengthen our leaders at Prizmah's inaugural conference in 2017.



## Melanie Eisen

Prior to joining Prizmah, Melanie Eisen was the Associate Director for Professional Development at the YUSP. Melanie, a native Montrealer, received her BA and MA from McGill and an MEd from George Washington University. Melanie partners with school teachers and leaders to plan and implement professional development programming that is dynamic, motivating and relevant, and honors the experience of our teachers. Melanie began her teaching career more than 20 years ago as a classroom teacher in a Jewish day school in Northern Virginia. While teaching, Melanie was always on the lookout for meaningful professional development and quickly began to provide it to others, both in her school and beyond. Melanie lives in Fairfax, Virginia, with her husband and two sons.



## Robin Feldman

Prior to joining Prizmah, Robin Feldman was the Director of Membership and Events at RAVSAK. Robin has a passion for working with Jewish youth in the formal and informal worlds of Jewish education, and has been doing so for more than 20 years. In the formal education sector, Robin worked as the Director of Membership and Events for RAVSAK for 13 years. She also worked as a team teacher for the El Paso Hebrew Day School (now known as the El Paso Jewish Academy) and as the Coordinator of Student Life for the Solomon Schechter High School of Long Island. In the world of informal education, Robin has worked on the local as well

as regional levels as Director of Youth for United Synagogue and Young Judeaea, and currently serves as Youth Director for one of the largest chapters in the Long Island Region of USY.



## Idana Goldberg

Prior to joining Prizmah, Dr. Idana Goldberg, our Vice President, Field Advancement and Advocacy, was the Co-Executive Director at RAVSAK.

Before joining the field of Jewish education, Idana was the Director of Strategic Grant making for a private foundation and the Director of the Matching Grants Program, both at the Jewish Funders Network. She received her BA from Barnard College and her PhD in History from the University of Pennsylvania with concentrations in Modern Jewish History, American Religion, and Gender and Feminist Theory. She is the author of "Crafting a Class: College Admissions and Financial Aid, 1955-1994." Idana serves on the Board of Directors for JOFA: the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance. She is an alumna of Jewish day schools and a parent of three children in Jewish day schools.



## Sharon Haselkorn

Prior to joining Prizmah, Sharon Haselkorn was the Vice President, Endowment, Coaching and Curriculum at PEJE. Sharon is currently Senior Advisor for

the 2017 Prizmah North American Jewish Day School Conference. Her work at PEJE over the last 10-plus years included developing training curriculum for Generations, enhancing staff work culture, data gathering and analysis, managing PEJE coaching, and serving as Strategy Officer. Previously, she worked as an independent whole-school change coach and an instructor in teacher preparation and in-service programs, specializing in literacy instruction for K-12. She is passionate about researching, teaching and facilitating the kind of conversation that mediates learning and collective action. Her volunteer leadership includes board work at several Boston-area Jewish day schools. She holds a EdD from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and has three adult children, all day school graduates.



## Shira Heller

Prior to joining Prizmah, Shira Heller was the Assistant Director for Professional Development at YUSP. Shira designs learning opportunities for Jewish

day school teachers and leaders, connecting them to valuable resources and to each other. A dynamic presenter with an ability to build relationships with and among a variety of audiences, Shira is a sought-after teacher, consultant and coach. Before joining YUSP, Shira worked in diverse educational settings. She served as a classroom teacher, a campus Jewish educator at Boston University and an adult educator at the Manhattan Jewish Experience. Shira has done post-graduate work in teaching English at Florida Atlantic University and received her MSW from Yeshiva University's Wurzweiler School of Social Work.



## Andrea Hernandez

Prior to joining Prizmah, Andrea Hernandez was the codirector at edJEWcon and professional learning coordinator at the Martin J. Gottlieb Day

School. Andrea is a strong advocate for thoughtful use of technology to make education more relevant for today's students. She is a passionate believer in student choice and voice. As part of her work at the Martin J. Gottlieb Day School, she cocreated edJEWcon, a 21st century learning conference for Jewish day school educators. Currently, she serves as edJEWcon's codirector for Prizmah, where she coaches teachers and administrators to transform teaching and learning "one blog at a time." To learn more, follow her on Twitter @edtechworkshop.



## Shira Loewenstein

Prior to joining Prizmah, Shira Loewenstein was the Associate Director for Teaching and Learning at YUSP for five years and also was part of the

Delet program, where she worked to educate and mentor pre-service teachers both at Brandeis University and Hebrew Union College. Shira spent 10 years as a classroom teacher ranging from first to eighth grade. She specialized in math, science, Mishnah and Tanakh. She currently works with schools to develop systems of support for new teachers, support school leaders and improve classroom instruction. Shira is particularly interested in pedagogical practices of all teachers, thinking about how kids think and helping teachers grow as leaders. She has her MA from Brandeis University and is finishing her dissertation in Yeshiva University's doctoral program for Jewish education and administration.



## Jon Mitzmacher

Prior to joining Prizmah, Dr. Jon Mitzmacher was Executive Director of the Schechter Day School Network. Jon, Vice President of Innovation at Prizmah,

was born in New Jersey and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he attended the University of California at Berkeley, graduating with a BA in psychology in 1994. He continued his studies at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, graduating in 1997 with a MEd and in 1998 with an MB. He completed his EdD in Jewish education in 2012 from the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Jon is the former head of the Martin J. Gottlieb Day School (a K-8 Schechter), located in Jacksonville, Florida, and part of the Jacksonville Jewish Center. He was the founding head of the Solomon Schechter Day School of Las Vegas. Jon is cofounder of edJEWcon and has worked in all aspects of Jewish education from camping to congregations and everything in between. He lives with his wife, Jaimee, a public school teacher, and daughters Eliana (age 11) and Maytal (age 8).



## Dan Perla

Prior to joining Prizmah, Dan Perla served as the Vice President for Program and Strategy at The Foundation for Jewish Camp and played a pivotal role in

creating the Green Book on Jewish Camping—a funders guide to Jewish camps. As Director of Financial Vitality at Prizmah, Dan oversees the Generations, Atidenu and GFA program teams. These are programs aimed at boosting school revenues and creating a financially sustainable future. Dan is also involved in other school revenue initiatives, such as giving circles and alternative tuition programs. Previously, Dan worked as a program officer in day school finance at The AVI CHAI Foundation. He is a graduate of NYU's Stern School of Business and has an MBA in management from The Wharton School at The University of Pennsylvania. Dan has four children, ages 19, 17, 15 and 11. Each child attends or attended SAR Academy and SAR High School as well as Jewish camps including Ramah, Moshava and Yavneh.



## Elliott Rabin

Prior to joining Prizmah, Elliott Rabin was the Director of Project and Content Development at RAVSAK, initiating programs such as Project

ROPE: Roots of Philanthropy Education, Moot Beit Din, JCAT, the Hebrew Poetry Contest and Judaic Art Contest. Elliott has worked in Jewish education at a variety of levels and institutions.

Previously, he was the director of education at Makor, a program of the 92nd Street Y specializing in outreach to Jews in their 20s and 30s. He has taught classes in Jewish Studies, Hebrew Language and Literature, and World Literature in settings ranging from JCCs and synagogues to the University of Louisville, Baruch College and New York University. Elliott holds a PhD in comparative literature, with a specialty in Hebrew, from Indiana University. He is the author of *Understanding the Hebrew Bible: A Reader's Guide* (Ktav), a book that makes biblical scholarship accessible and relevant to a general audience.

## Donna Von Samek



Prior to joining Prizmah, Donna Von Samek was the Head of Branding, Content and Promotional Strategy at YUSP. From a young age, Donna was fascinated by the power of storytelling, and that is what

has driven her passion for marketing. Over the past decade, Donna's marketing career has spanned the entertainment, retail and nonprofit industries. She considers herself a "collector" of inspiration from sources far and wide, and seeks to apply the things that inspire her toward creating fresh and trailblazing ways of telling the story of Jewish education.

## Debra Shaffer Seeman



Prior to joining Prizmah, Debra Shaffer Seeman was Network Weaver at RAVSAK. Debra brings a depth of experience in nurturing learning communities, building institutions and network weaving throughout

the Jewish community. Before moving to Atlanta in 2003, Debra lived in Jerusalem, where she was a founding administrator of Tal Torah, a center for intergenerational Torah learning. As an avid teacher of classical Jewish texts and an educational entrepreneur, she has served in a variety of educational settings in Israel and North America, including Dror Elementary School, Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, Florence Melton Adult Mini School, Rambam Atlanta Day School, Yeshiva Atlanta High School and RAVSAK. She is a proud graduate of both Mandel Jerusalem Fellows and Harvard University. Debra, mother of four, is lucky to be married to Rabbi Dr. Don Seeman.

# Beyond Parallel Play

## Systemic Collaboration Across Disciplines

Jewish day schools claim that they offer the best of both worlds: a stellar secular academic education combined with a meaningful and intellectual Jewish education.

However, at many schools those two educational tracks often operate independently of one another. Two separate faculties, separate learning blocks, separate staff meetings, separate educational goals and sometimes even separate classrooms. Two parallel lines stretching out next to each other, never intersecting.

But what if they did? What if we made the intersection the founding principle of our schools?

In his 1958 essay “The Non-Jewish Jew,” Isaac Deutscher wrote about influential scholars such as Freud, saying that “as Jews they dwelt on the borderlines of various civilizations, religions and national cultures. They were born and brought up on the borderlines of various epochs. Their minds matured where the most diverse cultural influences crossed and fertilized each other. They lived on the margins or in the nooks and crannies of their respective nations. ... It was this that enables them ... to strike out mentally into wide new horizons and far into the future.” He claims that it is precisely because of the Jew’s ability to both “absorb and transcend” the limits of the particular and the universal that great learning and new ideas can emerge. If applied to our schools, dare we say that not collaborating is actually doing a disservice to our students? That perhaps we are obligated to find models for integration and collaboration in order to provide our students with an adequate education, and that anything less is not an option?

Jewish children in America in the 21st century are the Jews Deutscher describes; they stand with feet firmly planted in multiple communities, real and virtual. Boundary crossing and self-identifying with multiple identities has become commonplace, so why not in our education? Over the course of the past two years, the educational team at Yavneh Day School has been experimenting with adopting such an integrated and collaborative approach as a founding principle.

Imagine a science teacher asking the students to find their lab chavruta.

Imagine a grammar lesson on the semicolon producing an original and innovative interpretation on Mordechai’s motives for “adopting” Esther.

Imagine two eighth grade girls facing each other bent over two texts, analyzing Maya Angelou’s *Phenomenal Woman* and Eshet Chayil, exploring the text-to-text-to-self relationship.

Imagine a student trying to interpret the Torah text that has become known as the commandment for tefillin as if seeing it for the first time, and through applying the engineering and Design Thinking process creating a prototype for what this mitzvah could look like.

There is a process to overcoming two major mental hurdles in taking this new approach. The first involves rethinking specific pieces of curricula that have become commonplace and are assumed to be essential, and instead focusing on big ideas and questions for inquiry. The second involves breaking down the false dichotomy of ownership of different subjects that often results in a war over who gets more time to teach their subject. Rather than compromising over subject air time, the focus should shift to creating a learning experience for the child that is crafted by collaborative teachers. Traditional approaches to Jewish education may have focused on basic literacy through study of Chumash-Navi-Mishnah-Gemarah. Other approaches might put the emphasis on exploration through the lens of Jewish history or thematic units based on a mixture of themes learned in each grade.

Standard attempts to create collaboration often are reminiscent of parallel play—that is, teachers in various domains agree to teach aspects of their respective subjects in ways that mirror some aspect of what is being taught in another subject. For example, while a US history teacher might be teaching about the American Revolution or the War of Independence, Jewish studies might be focusing on the Touro Synagogue or great Jewish heroes of the period. Similarly, a unit on immigration to the United States might parallel a Jewish studies class on aliyot to Israel. While the history teacher might be teaching World War II, the Jewish studies teacher may teach the Shoah and the English Language Arts might decide to read *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

The experiment that we have undertaken involves evolving from a place of parallel play to one of collaborative play. In this new model of systemic collaboration, we are experimenting with schedules that are based on teamwork: collaborative prep time and collaborative teaching. The model entails taking big ideas and using them to build units that are actually co-taught by two expert teachers from different domains in the classroom at that same time. The teachers themselves, many of whom have been trained in hevruta study/ Pedagogy of Partnership through Mechon Hadar, use these methods in their own study and as they prepare with each other. They then use these same principles in the teaching of all subjects, promoting collaboration as a method as well. Furthermore, we have made an explicit effort to reframe the answer to the question “What do you teach?” Our teachers don’t teach “third graders,” nor do they teach “math” or “Jewish studies.” They teach children. By placing the child’s learning experience at the center and as the goal, the teachers have the freedom to collaborate together in the best interest of the child’s learning goals, intertwining the subjects as relevant and needed.

Faculty are increasingly placing emphasis on creating connections and relevance. The creativity of this approach is contagious; when teachers collaboratively begin building one unit, they suddenly see possibilities of connections anywhere and everywhere. As an example, in preparing for the study of Megillat Esther the planning between the Jewish studies expert and the language arts expert led to a deeper literary analysis unit co-taught by both together that was then extended into a social-emotional advisory unit on temper. An added bonus to this collaborative model is not just a more enriching learning experience for the students, but a more rewarding working environment for the teachers as well. One teacher shared with us that teaching this way is so enjoyable because she is learning so much more herself through collaborating with other teachers.

At its core, such a model requires conscious, intention-driven, systemic collaboration by teachers. So how does one get to this point? So far, some of what we have tried includes:

- Schedules and staffing built from the ground up to be conducive to co-planning, co-teaching and co-reflecting.
- Educational thinking that intertwines particular skills and objectives with greater purpose.
- Taking time to build a caring community among the faculty to create trust between team members.
- Hiring and retention of individual teachers who feel competent and confident as experts in their own field and have a stance of openness and excitement about learning.
- Stance of the whole child at the center.
- Design thinking workshops: learning through questions and guided inquiry.
- Jewish studies-focused workshops for teachers of secular studies (e.g., Mechon Hadar, American Jewish History Museum).
- Secular studies workshops for Hebrew teachers (from Singapore Math and Math Talks).

One of our main goals as a Jewish day school is to build and reinforce Jewish identity within our students. Thus, inevitably, the hub of collaboration stems from Jewish studies. The greatest amount of co-teaching energy is centered around finding Jewish relevance within secular subjects as well as finding secular relevance with inherently Jewish topics. By now, this way of thinking has become

so prevalent that the presence of a Jewish studies teacher is no longer necessary to spark these connections in teachers of secular studies.

What are we losing by teaching this way? While there is still time put aside in our schedule to celebrate the concept of Torah lishmah, it is clear that by using this approach, we may not teach every item that was previously in our curriculum. Students may not graduate knowing the same things that prior generations of students were taught. They will graduate having learned different concepts, but in a way that is more relevant and connected to the rest of their education. Creating a collaborative curriculum is reflective of the human we aim to help shape: a whole person whose lens is one of Jewish texts and values, who identifies as a member of the Jewish people, and who uses Jewish values and identity as they explore the world. As Abraham was proclaimed an “Ivri,” a boundary crosser, so too should our students be encouraged to cross the various domains of their identity and like Moses, Freud, Einstein and Abzug, become contributing citizens of the human race. What we have observed is that, through the collaborative effort of teachers and students, these boundary crossings produce “wide new horizons” for the teachers and students alike.



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# Prizmah Staff Retreat

Just as schools take time for professional development and staff cohesion, Prizmah values in-person collaborative training and reflection for our far-flung employees. Our September staff retreat, under the expert management of Pearl Mattenson of Rosov Consulting, was chock-full of fun, creative exercises that enabled us to air our dreams and share our passions for Jewish day school education. The two-day meeting gave us the opportunity to strengthen our connections to each other and the alignment of our goals and methods for working together. We emerged with renewed confidence and excitement for our collaboration with day schools in the year ahead.



# Teacher Collaboration

## to Improve Value Proposition

The following emails arrived in my inbox soon after the opening of a school where I had assumed the headship.

Hi, Rabbi. I'm writing to tell you that my child will be arriving late to school tomorrow because of a scheduled medical appointment. I'm sure it won't be too much of a problem since these are Jewish studies periods. Also, would you please speak with your Jewish studies teachers to ask that they lighten the homework load for the next few weeks? My child is in a play at the local drama club and won't have time for Jewish studies homework.

Shalom, Rabbi. I am writing to tell you that after much consideration and your continued conversations with us, we will not be enrolling our children in a Jewish high school. The cost of tuition has just gone beyond our ability to pay. Besides, our local public school has a very high rate of acceptances to prestigious colleges. We plan to provide one or two hours per week of Hebrew tutoring to keep up the Jewish studies.

In the days and months that followed, similarly themed notes arrived. Although this was a school that took pride in offering a dual curriculum and boasted of its excellence, it soon became clear that to segments of the school's population, the school's Jewish studies took second place in the academic race to graduation.

### Inequality in Perceived Value

To be true to the school's mission, all of the school's offerings—curricular, extracurricular, sports and informal experiences—must be seen as significantly contributing to its value proposition. To accomplish this, there must be a common language as an expression of the unity of purpose. For me, this is demonstrated through skill development across the curriculum.

Whether by design or default, Jewish day schools are viewed as having two divisions that provide two separate products. They have two faculties, one whose expertise and experience is designated for Jewish studies and one where the professional knowledge and proficiency is in general studies. In some schools, this separation is embedded in different salary scales, workplace expectations and licensure. In others this distinction is exhibited by title—Rebbe and Morah rather than Mr. and Ms.

The separation is most noticeable in the curriculum. Most significantly, general studies teachers have government-created course outlines to follow and benchmarks to be met through standardized testing and are concerned with developing skills for matriculation—elementary to high school, high school to college. Jewish studies teachers aim to transmit and instill the values and culture of Judaism through the courses that they teach, with the goal of creating a Jewish bond for their students. In these situations, there is no common language to unite the faculty and present to the school community a unified educational approach.

The effect of this bifurcated faculty is that each group pursues its own agenda. For their part, students can compartmentalize their learning. It is not uncommon for students to learn to provide significantly different responses to the same question, one to satisfy their Jewish studies teacher and one that the general studies teacher will find acceptable. (They might also have different responses for their sports coach or the faculty advisor for their favorite club.) The cognitive dissonance that this can produce has a destructive potential. When there is a need for students and parents to prioritize, general studies is often favored. The not-so-subtle message is that Jewish studies is less important. Taken to the extreme, when faced with rising tuition, parents can use this calculus to rationalize enrollment in public school.

This was the problem facing our school. The school's value proposition as a place to fashion a wholesome Jewish person with excellent study and workplace skills was lost. Parents and students did not see Jewish and general studies on the same plane. The increasingly high cost of tuition became a reason to escape the system. Within the school community, Jewish studies teachers were increasingly pressured to sacrifice their expectations on the altar of general studies achievements. The result was reduced enrollment and a demoralized staff.

For me as a school leader, achieving the school's goal of creating responsible Jewish citizens capable of being community leaders could only begin by unifying the staff. Increasingly, meetings of the entire staff were not productive, as there was not a clear understanding of mutually shared goals and objectives. Arranging social activities as a means of building an esprit de corps was challenging. During lunch, teachers of Jewish and general studies each gravitated to their own space. There was little sharing of information, with the result that homework, tests and project deadlines were not coordinated to balance the demands on students. Teacher evaluation was difficult because the perceived outcomes were different for Jewish and general studies teachers.

## Forging Common Language

Creating a unified culture of faculty collaboration can signal the importance to all stakeholders of the unique opportunities afforded in Jewish day school. Values and content need not be separated. Every faculty member can be seen as modeling Jewish culture and values. This can be done only where there is a common language.

With the perception today that facts are "Google-able," the instructional emphasis must be on skills. This can become the common language and is applicable across the curriculum.

Time management, critical thinking, organization, research and technology use are not inherently related to Jewish or general studies. One can learn about the majesty of the Creator in a science class and apply critical thinking skills to the study of a Jewish text.

Time management is essential to manage a dual curriculum, and organization is necessary to participate in sports and extra-curricular activities while maintaining attention to academic pursuits.

To begin the process, a small group of teachers representing different disciplines, four Jewish studies and four general studies, gathered to identify skills that were outcomes of their individual curricula. These teachers then met with their department colleagues to further identify the skills that were part of their course syllabi. Sample lesson plans with skill outcomes were developed and circulated.

At the next staff meeting, members of the small group presented skills-based lesson plans. The staff was then divided into five groups, one for each of the five identified skills: time management, critical thinking, organization, research, technology use. Each group was asked to produce two lessons, one for Jewish studies and one for general studies, using the designated skill. These were to be prepared during the next month, at which time the results would be shared with the larger group at the subsequent staff meeting. Faculty worked together using their lunch and prep periods.

Gradually, "skills" became the lingua franca, for faculty, students and parents. Announcement of this process was shared with parents, with regular updates on progress. A highlight of the first year was a compendium of student-prepared *divrei Torah* to accompany the Haggadah on Seder night. In the introduction to the booklet, it was noted this was a multidisciplinary document incorporating the five skills that were being emphasized throughout the school. In the second year, a project-based learning model was introduced. Having a unified language of learning facilitated a multidisciplinary approach. We were also fortunate to have added two new members to the faculty who were capable of teaching on both sides of the curriculum and could model this skills-based approach to learning.

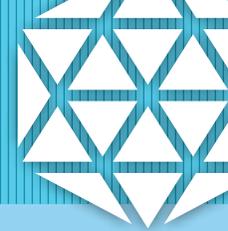
At the next professional development day, faculty input was sought for the revised lesson plan format as well as the rubric for teacher evaluation, which was revised to place an emphasis on skill development. Teacher collaboration was becoming the school's culture.

## Going Forward

Marketing and fundraising materials were revised to place a common emphasis on skills. Parent ambassadors were trained to speak about the core values of the school, which transcend parochial divisions. The school's value proposition was now much broader and appealed to a larger segment of the community. Enrollment increased. Teacher morale improved and absences decreased. Students became reluctant to allow medical appointments to be scheduled during class time for fear of missing out.

As part of the annual grant proposal to the local Federation, the emphasis on skills was emphasized. One of the members of the grant committee known for being skeptical of the value of a Jewish day school education became a vocal supporter of the allocation, saying, "Graduates of this school will have gained the necessary skills to be successful in the workplace, the home and the community."

As Victor Adler (Austrian politician, 1852-1918) noted, "If I can answer the question of 'What for?' the 'how' becomes possible." Creating a "whole person" approach to learning is the "what for." Faculty collaboration using a common language of instruction is the "how."



# Reshet Prizmah

**Debra Shaffer Seeman, Debra Abolafia, Sam Chestnut, Beth Cohen, Tracie Glazer, Allison Oakes, Melanie Waynik and Lynn Raviv**

Jewish day schools that reside in small communities face challenges not often shared by larger schools in larger communities. Among these challenges are isolation from other Jewish day schools, small school populations and limited resources, both financial and human. A group of six heads of school from small communities—Debra Abolafia from the N.E. Miles Jewish Day School (Birmingham, AL), Sam Chestnut from The Lippman School (Akron, OH), Beth Cohen from Friedel Jewish Academy (Omaha, NE), Tracie Glazer from Hillel Community Day School (Rochester, NY), Allison Oakes from Lerner School (Durham, NC), and Melanie Waynik from Ezra Academy (Woodbridge, CT)—are collaborating with Lynn Raviv on the development of a sixth through eighth grade curriculum that seeks to address these issues and serve as a model for future collaboration and resource sharing among small communities around North America. Lynn has worked with all of these heads previously as a coach in Prizmah's Head of School Professional Excellence Program, which provides intensive support to heads early in their tenure at a day school.

Engaging in the concept of "social justice" and its enactment through day schools' commitment to Jewish values and identity, each school is asking their students to examine the links between Jewish, Jewish American and Civil Rights experiences. Teachers and students from participating schools will work collaboratively and interactively throughout the school year, with a culminating shared civil rights, Jewish identity-based, authentic educational trip at the end of each school year: Birmingham and Selma in sixth grade, Washington, DC, in seventh grade, and Israel in eighth grade.

The group is currently in the planning and design stage of their three-year initiative.

Through multiple virtual meetings and independent and collaborative work, this group has found that the emerging model allows for robust, effective and economically efficient professional development for all participating schools in the areas of best practice-based curricula creation, Design Thinking, and the authentic integration of secular American and Judaic studies at the middle school level. The design of this pilot initiative includes the ability to scale up in order to include new cohort groups, schools and disciplines, and even possibly new grade levels. The group is currently seeking funding to support the initiative and is looking forward to sharing their learning and achievements with the field.

These heads of school understand that working in collaboration and bringing together teacher leaders from their schools promises two outcomes with exceptional potential. First, it will provide their faculty and students with a precious opportunity to build community and a shared sense of purpose among the six schools. The impact on students' social learning leads the work, as students in schools from smaller communities often do not have a larger Jewish network in which to build ideas, knowledge and shared experiences. The program increases the number of students in a "classroom," creates a community of practice for teachers, provides a collegial lifeline for heads of schools, and addresses the unique situations of underserved Jewish day schools in small communities.

Second, the program is meant to serve as a model for collaborative thinking and joint educational initiatives for schools in North America to follow. By connecting values and learning to action through expanded social circles for students, strong collaborative professional development for faculty, and cutting-edge curricular offerings, this program uses innovation to address their schools' specific issues surrounding recruitment and retention. Following this model of collaboration, additional leaders can address their own school's

particular needs with the support and partnership of colleagues. The leaders of this initiative plan to share their process and document learning through school-based documentation, Hebrew and English newsletters, articles to the field, and conference presentations.

As Allison Oakes explains, "This program is a way to expand our community beyond our geographical location. Though we have few professional and financial resources at our disposal, by coming together our students will have the opportunity to understand the global reach of the Jewish community." Melanie Waynik agrees and adds that "different community perspectives and Jewish lenses make the collaboration that much more exciting and broadening." In addition, she describes the excitement in adding new dimensions to her school's learning: "Collaborations like this one will help my school leaders to think outside the box in other areas and encourage us to take risks and be courageous educators."

Prizmah is deeply committed to the power of the Jewish day school network, supporting schools that come together to invest in strong educational experiences for their communities. Through Reshet Prizmah, our networking portfolio supervised by Network Weaver Debra Shaffer Seeman, we connect both professional and lay members of day school communities one to another for collaboration, support, guidance, experimentation and plenty of laughs along the way. The initiative featured here exemplifies the potential of day school leaders to create a transformative educational experience by leveraging the power of their networks.

At Prizmah, we believe that collaboration and networking among schools are some of the most powerful opportunities afforded to school leaders. Prizmah hopes to support and encourage such efforts going forward. School leaders interested in laying the groundwork for similar types of collaborative initiatives are invited to contact Debra Shaffer Seeman at [debra@ravsak.org](mailto:debra@ravsak.org).

# Ingredients

## for Authentic Collaboration

True collaboration results only when there is a commitment to bringing the experiences, values and thoughts of multiple educators to the table so that they can listen to one another. Merely convoking teachers with different backgrounds and expertise, or who work in different grade levels or types of schools, will not ensure a rich exchange of ideas or promote growth in learning.

### The Definition of and Importance of Real Collaboration

Ecclesiastes speaks about how one should not be alone, as there is greater protection, support and strength when one has a partner: *Tovim hashnayim min ha-echad*, two are better than one. As educators, we all know that the same principle applies whether writing curriculum or developing programs. Working with a partner can be far more effective than working alone. Even more relevant is the continuation of the verse in Ecclesiastes: “a *threefold* cord is not easily broken.”

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “collaborate” as “work jointly with others or together, especially in an intellectual endeavor.” The definition sounds simple: put two or more people together to work on a joint venture, and you’ve got collaboration. But what we strive for in education in terms of collaboration is so much more. Our belief is that by proactively crafting joint efforts that take into account the unique strengths of each working partner, the result will be far better than merely putting two people together in a room and telling them to collaborate.

The education theorist Joseph Schwab focused on the need for a deliberative stance in curriculum planning. Schwab claimed that in order to produce the best materials, groups needed to be formed so that there was one participant to represent each of the four commonplaces of education (child’s perspective/development, teacher needs, subject matter innovation and social component/social change) with a fifth who was a curriculum specialist. Simply put, Schwab understood that in order to achieve quality curricular results, one needed to bring together a range of varied expertise in a way that would allow for serious and productive collaboration.

## An “Old-New” Model of Collaboration

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As Jews, we do not have to go far to find an excellent model for good collaboration. Havruta learning has been the core of Jewish text study for thousands of years. However, it is not self-evident that good collaboration takes place in every environment where havruta is used. Havruta study that is a truly collaborative effort involves far more than just sitting with a partner.

According to the landmark scholarship of Orit Kent and Allison Cook, “Havruta learning [is] composed of three pairs of core practices: listening and articulating; wondering and focusing; and supporting and challenging.” Within each of those couplets, havruta participants are required to bring their own thoughts, feelings, ideas, beliefs. They are expected to wonder about the thread of the text from their own perspective, and to challenge their partner’s ideas with their own. At the same time, havruta participants are not only encouraged but required to take into account the partner’s thoughts, feelings, ideas and beliefs. They must actively listen to their partner and validate their thinking; they must support their partner’s wondering and then help them refocus on the text when it’s time; they must challenge their partner in a supportive manner and support their partner in a challenging manner. In short: real havruta learning inculcates and celebrates the idea that different people can and should work together. Each havruta participant is charged with bringing their own best self, and with bringing out their partner’s best self. In havruta learning, both of these are of equal and utmost importance.

This is the collaborative model we believe in at Pardes. Bringing together learning partners from different backgrounds, denominations, genders and interest areas is the ideal that we aim for in our beit midrash. Our cohorts of Jewish educators in training consist of both future day school Jewish studies teachers and experiential Jewish educators; the cross-pollination of the very different types of educators working collaboratively exponentially enriches the program.

Now, it is imperative to say out loud: the skills of havruta—collaboration—must be learned and practiced. They must be modeled and instilled. Within actual Torah study, these skills are much more important than the learning level of the two members of a havruta. The object is not to get through the material but to wrestle with it, so that the ultimate understanding is far greater than what either partner could have achieved alone—the mark of good collaboration. *This is just as true in our schools when creating curriculum or solving institutional issues as it is in a beit midrash when studying Torah.* That wrestling with material, addressing an issue, or creating a program or curriculum can certainly happen within or across departments and grade levels if collaborative skills are taught to faculty, and if school leadership stresses the value of each individual bringing their own self, knowledge, experience and openness to the other to the endeavor. We need to ask ourselves if, and how often, we do that in our schools and institutions.

## Bringing Each Teacher’s Voice to the Collaborative Work

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We believe that the first step toward collaboration is actually *self-reflection*, as counterintuitive as that might seem. Each partner needs to be aware of his/her own thoughts, values, strengths, challenges and the experiences he/she brings to the equation. In laying out his theory of multiple intelligences, Howard Gardner includes interpersonal (the ability to self-reflect).

We have made self-reflection a key and initial component of the work we do at the Pardes Center for Jewish Educators. In pedagogy class, we ask students to first reflect on themselves as learners. Later they explore what it means to have a vision, and before graduating, they produce a piece on their own beliefs (Ani Ma’amin). Our last two tefillah conferences (called Aleinu Leshabe’ach) began with sessions on “Myself as Mitpalel,” and from there to “Myself as Tefillah Facilitator.” We have taken the same approach in our professional development work on “Myself as a Student of Bible,” and moving from there to “Myself as Bible Teacher.” In all settings, to achieve valuable collaborative work, each person needs to be aware of what they have to contribute.

The second step involves sharing that reflection with others. Not only do we need to know “who am I,” but also “who is the other.” What different perspective might they have to share based on what they bring? (Here, we connect to Gardner’s interpersonal intelligence.) In fact, simply recognizing that there are other ways to view the world than the one we have is a major step forward, and requires the type of learning how to collaborate that we referred to above.

Being clear as to what we bring, and understanding what the other brings, is the basis upon which we can then proceed to learn, grow and work together in applying the learning. This prevents the situation where one person drags along the others in the team, without giving them ample opportunity to contribute—and therefore to arrive at a collaborative work that is deeper and more nuanced than what any one member might have done alone.

There are so many opportunities for this to take place in schools. Peer coaching, practiced in only a few schools thus far, has the potential for real growth if carefully carried out. More schools are beginning to experiment with PLCs (Professional Learning Communities), designed to allow teachers to collaborate and enrich one another’s understanding of the field they are addressing.

## Assuring We Have Set the Stage

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As administrators, we need to ask ourselves, have we done the necessary preparatory work to allow collaboration to happen? Have we sufficiently emphasized its value within our school? Have we communicated that value in annual reviews and in hiring? Have we created time and space within the school for teachers to work together? Have we created community and safe space for our teachers? Have we helped them to acquire the needed skills?

Thousands of educators have embraced the concept of 21st century learning, with collaboration a key element of that approach. The skills for success that are now needed for the global citizens of tomorrow rely upon creative collaboration. If for no other reason than to be able to help our students acquire these much-needed skills, we as administrators and teachers need to experience what it means to work collaboratively. We must learn how to work effectively and respectfully with others who may come from different backgrounds and function differently than we do. We need to be able to value the contributions made by each member of any team of which we are a member.

# On My Nightstand

Brief reviews of books that Prizmah staff are reading

## *The Ideal Team Player: How to Recognize and Cultivate The Three Essential Virtues*, by Patrick Lencioni

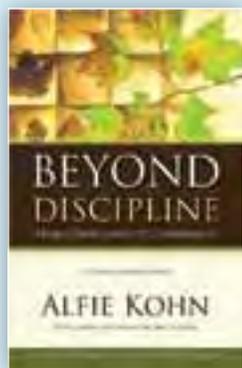


I always find the fables that Lencioni writes so easy to read and easy to understand. This book is no different. Here, his character Jeff Shanley develops a set of core leadership principles, which, along with his deep sense of collaboration with his leadership team, helped their business overcome challenges. The “three essential virtues” for an ideal team player, Humble, Hungry and Smart (about people), have already impacted my own practice and have become a part of the work I do with leaders of schools. To be able

to distill and assess what we need from others on our team is incredibly useful. To reflect on our own practice in these three virtues (with an assessment tool included) is powerful. Leadership teams that read this fable together can openly talk about their strengths and areas for growth, advancing their own work as team members.

**Jane Cohen**

## *Beyond Discipline*, by Alfie Kohn

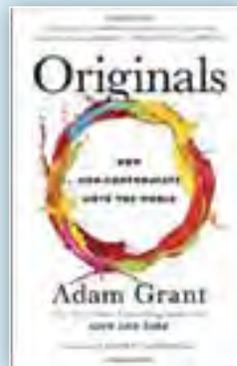


As classroom teachers, our senses are bombarded all day with the needs of our students. Alfie Kohn pushes us to think about the choices we make: how we react to our students, how we create expectations in the classroom, and how we can honor our students all to develop a community. This community should reflect choice, understanding and growth. This community should be the reflection of our students' needs and not ours. Kohn brutally reviews discipline systems based on the carrot

and the stick, rewards and punishment. He stresses that this manner of “managing” a classroom will not create the community we seek. We have to always be asking the question why—why are these my expectations in the classroom, why should my students buy into this community, and whose needs am I thinking of on a daily basis? If you have made it a goal to be reflective in your practice, this short, easy-to-read book will help you begin to ask the right questions.

**Melanie Eisen**

## *Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World*, by Adam Grant



If you have ever had a big idea, chances are that at some point you've thought, “If it's really such a great idea, someone would have thought of it already.” Adam Grant's newest book gives ideators the confidence to overcome the hurdles that often prevent our ideas from seeing the light of day. By citing case studies of ideas and inventions that had total buy-in but were commercially unsuccessful, and record-breaking businesses that no one believed could work, Grant offers the data and motivation that will push you to look boldly beyond what already exists and bring into your world something truly new and meaningful.

**Donna Von Samek**

## *Creativity Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration*, by Ed Catmull and Amy Wallace



*Creativity Inc.* is one of my favorite go-to management guides. Ed Catmull, co-founder of Pixar and current president of Pixar and Disney Animation Studios, shares compelling examples and anecdotes illustrating how he's built an innovative and creative culture. Through tales of success, and perhaps more interestingly the failures and complications along the way, Catmull's lessons derived from the organizational history and development of animated film can be easily transferred to the classroom,

boardroom and faculty meeting. Imagine an aura of creativity permeating through the halls. *Creativity Inc.* challenges the reader to take bold leaps, build a great team and embrace change that is invaluable and vital to innovation and success. A must-read for any leader, creative thinker or Pixar fan!

**Traci Stratford**

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