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Hayidion



Special Needs

## **HaYidion: The RAVSAK Journal**

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### **Contributors**

Candice Baugh LMHC, Beverly Bernstein, Shelly Christensen, Melanie Fernandez PhD, Rabbi Rafael Feuerstein, Ruth Gorin, Mariashi Groner, Linda Hoffenberg, Lenore Layman, Rabbi David Kalb, Dori Frumin Kirshner, Sandy Miller-Jacobs EdD, Gail Norry, Alan Oliff, Meredith Englander Polsky, Arlene Remz, Elizabeth Roberts PsyD, Ralph Schwartz, Sue Schweber, David Soloff, Heather Tratt, Abbie Weisberg, Linda Zimmerman.

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Please contact Marla Rottenstreich at [marlar@ravsaq.org](mailto:marlar@ravsaq.org) or by phone at 646-450-7280.

### **RAVSAK**

120 West 97th Street, New York, NY 10025

p: 212-665-1320 • f: 212-665-1321 • e: [info@ravsaq.org](mailto:info@ravsaq.org) • w: [www.ravsaq.org](http://www.ravsaq.org)

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# **in THIS ISSUE:**

## **QUESTIONS AND SOLUTIONS**

### **The Psychology of Mainstreaming**

• by **Refael S. Feuerstein**, page 6

### **Lessons from the Public School Experience**

• by **Alan Oliff**, page 10

### **To Include or Not? The Day School Dilemma**

• by **Beverly Bernstein**, page 14

### **Funding Special Education: New Opportunities**

• by **Gail Norry**, page 16

### **Raising Awareness, Changing Attitudes**

• by **Dori Frumin Kirshner and Meredith Englander Polsky**, page 18

### **The Community Model for Special Education Services**

• by **Arlene Remz and Sue Schweber**, page 20

### **A School within a School**

• by **Linda Zimmerman**, page 22

### **What Can Camps Teach About Special Education?**

• by **David Soloff, Ralph Schwartz and Linda Hoffenberg**, page 26

## **WORKING WITH PARENTS**

### **Enemies a Love Story: The Family's Perspective**

• by **David Kalb**, page 30

### **Building Parent-Professional Collaboration**

• by **Shelly Christensen**, page 34

### **Partnering with Parents to Turn Vision into Reality**

• by **Mariashi Groner**, page 38

### **Special Education in Our Schools**

• Pages 40-43

## **IN THE CLASSROOM**

### **Inclusion Done Right—From the Top Down**

• by **Abbie Weisberg and Heather Tratt**, page 44

### **Proactively Meeting the Needs of All Students**

• by **Sandy Miller-Jacobs**, page 48

### **Team Support for Individualized Learning Needs**

• by **Lenore Layman**, page 50

### **Inclusion for Children on the Autism Spectrum**

• by **Candice Baugh and Elizabeth Roberts**, page 54

### **ADHD: What Teachers Need to Know**

• by **Melanie Fernandez**, page 58

### **Teaching Inclusion: The Whys and Hows**

• by **Ruth Gorin**, page 60

**From the Editor, Page 3 • From the Desk of Arnee Winshall, RAVSAK Chair, Page 4 • Conference, Page 32, Bookcase, Page 62**

# From the Editor

■ by **BARBARA DAVIS**

**A**RLENE Kanter, director of the Disability Law and Policy Program at the College of Law at Syracuse University—and mother of two graduates from my day school—is currently in Israel on a Fulbright scholarship to help Tel Aviv University establish the country's first academic program in disability studies. She was recently quoted as saying that what struck her most since arriving in Israel is how myths and misconceptions about people with disabilities transcend local cultural and religious boundaries, and how the fight for equal rights and social recognition for people with disabilities is a universal battle.

I would add that it is not only a universal but an ongoing battle, though fortunately one that we seem to be winning. This is not the first time that *HaYidion* has devoted an issue to special education in Jewish community day schools. The Chanukah 2005 issue also addressed the topic—in a twenty-page black and white newsletter with five articles. The current full-color issue of *HaYidion* is more than three times as long, with triple the number of articles, and while the problems delineated and the solutions offered clearly are nowhere near resolving the issue of equal and full access, they are a far cry from where we stood a mere six years ago.

The fact is that Judaism's dealings with those with disabilities have not always been positive. While you will find many quotes in this issue's articles citing Judaism's positive messages about equality, the reality is that our faith has historically been less than welcoming to those with disabilities. The Torah exhorts us not to place a stumbling block before the blind, but a blind person is not permitted to read the Torah; persons with disabilities or "blemishes" were forbidden to become kohanim, and in many congregations today, assistive hearing devices are not allowed because they require the use of electricity.

In the Jewish community day school world, thankfully, understanding of the need to be inclusive and caring of those with special needs has become normative. The process has not been easy, and schools and parents and the children themselves have often suffered great pain and an-



**DR. BARBARA DAVIS** is the Secretary of RAVSAK, Executive Editor of *HaYidion* and Head of School at the Syracuse Hebrew Day School in Dewitt, NY. Barbara can be reached at shds@twcny.rr.com.

guish as they have wrestled with the challenges involved in inclusive schooling. In the first-person accounts in this issue, you will hear of the heartbreak involved both for those parents who want their children to have a day school education and for those administrators who lack the funds to pay for the resources required. But you will also hear how commitment and perseverance, understanding and education have made tremendous progress possible.

We hope you will be informed and inspired by RAVSAK's journal, and will be able to translate the ideas and programs described herein into meaningful Jewish educational experiences for all of your students. ■

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# From the Desk of Arnee Winshall, RAVSAK Chair

**A**s the North American Jewish Day School Conference in LA came to a close, I found myself not only re-energized by the incredible sessions I attended, the people I met, and the sense of community that pervaded, but also reflective, thinking about the past year. It is hard to believe that just over a year ago, RAVSAK underwent a transition in governance and I assumed the board chair position with four other founding board members.

With every new undertaking, the current board of RAVSAK has the opportunity to appreciate the strong foundation built by the professionals who lead our schools and who shouldered the responsibility of leadership for RAVSAK over the past quarter century. Traveling the country this past year and visiting day schools, I am struck by the impact that RAVSAK has had on so many schools, an impact for which many of the school leaders, both lay and professional, have expressed tremendous appreciation.

In fact, it is as a result of this goodwill and true contribution to the growth and development of individual schools by a small but dedicated and powerful RAVSAK team that we have been able to attract remarkable talent to the RAVSAK board. Since its founding last January we have welcomed an additional five board members from schools across the country. The caliber of leadership that comprises the RAVSAK board at this time and the level of commitment are extraordinary. Since the last issue of *HaYidion*, Lisa Breslau (past board chair of Shalom School in Sacramento), Stacey Fisher (past chair of Rockwern Academy in Cincinnati) and Matt Heilicher (current board president of Amos and Celia Heilicher Minneapolis Jewish Day School) have joined our ranks and are already having an impact on our thinking and work. In fact, the conference enabled us to spend half a day meeting in person to take stock of our progress, plan our next steps and work with development consultants in developing the case for RAVSAK and honing our skills in raising the financial support that will help to ensure RAVSAK's continued success.

The conference exceeded all expectations with approximately 600 attendees joining us from around the world. Just as this issue is dedicated to how we provide those

students with special needs the attention they deserve, the RAVSAK staff (in collaboration with those from the PARDeS and Solomon Schechter day school net-



**Arnee Winshall** is the Chair of RAVSAK's Board of Directors, and Founding Chair of JCDS, Boston's Jewish Community Day School. Arnee can be reached at arnee@ravsa.org.

works and the University-School Partnership of Yeshiva University) led the way to ensure that the needs of each school and each attendee to the conference were being met. This is Jewish education at its finest, collaborating to meet the needs of the communities we serve.

Over this year, the respect and awe I have for RAVSAK staff, board members and school leaders continues to grow exponentially. They are exemplars of the Jewish community's finest and demonstrate their dedication to ensuring the continued value and strength of our network of outstanding schools every day.

It is a privilege to serve with and to learn from all of you.

*Bekhavod,*

Arnee Winshall

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# The Psychology of Mainstreaming

■ by **REFael S. FEUERSTEIN**

**A**ND Rav said to Rabbi Shmuel Bar Shilat (a well-known teacher of children during the Talmud period), “A student who knows how to read should read in class with his classmates, and those who do not know how to read should remain in the class in the company of their classmates.” (Talmud, Bava Batra 21a)

*You do not need to demand too much from the student who does not know how to read, but do not drive him away. Rather, he should sit together with the others and in due course he too will learn.* (Rashi’s commentary on the above)

The issue of mainstreaming special needs children in regular classes has become one of the most important concerns of my life. Twenty-two years ago our second son Elchanan was born with Down syndrome. From that time on Elchanan has attended only regular classes in regular schools and today he is finishing 12th grade and working on his Bagrut (matriculation) exams—certainly with all the exemptions that the Israeli educational system can offer, but still, he is doing them. Elchanan’s mainstreaming has led me to research the subject as, simultaneously, my own son was undergoing inclusion in regular classes.

In my view, there are eight major questions affecting mainstreaming of special needs children in regular classes. The first question is, “What justification is there for mainstreaming?” Why is mainstreaming so vital for special needs children? The answer commonly given to this question lies in the concept of the “right to equality.” UNESCO’s Salamanca Statement of 1994 made jointly by 92 nations states that special needs students “must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs.”

The Salamanca Statement talks about rights. It does not determine that inclusion is the best move for the child. It assumes that fulfillment of this basic right is the most appropriate thing, but is it in fact the best thing? There is a deep schism between parents, teachers and specialists regarding this question, so we do not think that inclusion can only be based on moral right but rather on the advantages to the mainstreamed child, too.

In order to explain “advantages” there is a need for a brief preamble on two theories by which we are guided: the theory of Structural Cognitive Modifiability and the theory of Mediated Learning Experience, both formulated by my father, Dr. Reuven Feuerstein. The theory of Structural Cognitive Modifiability postulates that the most significant property of any human being is the ability to change. Feuerstein talks about the option for change. This option is certainly conditional on the existence

of adequate efforts, and at times the efforts needed are great indeed. However, even if they do not exist, the option remains. By “modifiability” what is meant is the fundamental ability of human beings to break through three bar-



**Rabbi Refael Feuerstein** is Vice-Chairman of the Feuerstein Institute: The International Institute for the Enhancement of Learning Potential in Jerusalem. He can be contacted at rafffeur@netvision.net.il.

riers, usually considered impassable: the etiological barrier, the age barrier and the severity-of-the-condition barrier.

The theory of Mediated Learning Experience explains the source of modifiability as lying in the fact that, according to Feuerstein, intelligence is not just innate (brain, nervous system, chromosomes) but it is also acquired. In other words, when young parents hold their newborn baby and talk to it, looking straight at it and following its gaze, in actual fact they are “mediating” to the baby the ability to focus one’s gaze on the major, most important stimulus. “Mediation” or “mediated learning” are terms we apply to all interactions with an added cognitive value that teach the child to learn and to think beyond the actual content of the interactions. When a mother tells her child a story about a lion drawing a parallel between the yellow color of the lion and the yellow-colored sofa they are sitting on, she is mediating the principle of comparison to her child. Just as a particular object has a certain property, so another object has the same property. The concept of “yellow” also has a mediating content as it is a merge of numerous shades of yellow grouped under one name—“yellow.” It also groups numer-

ous different and varied objects which are all the same color—"yellow."

We are all products of mediation. Behind the "education" we received, "mediation" was hiding. In all innocuous children's tales there are concepts, cause and effect principles ("because of ... so..."), before and after ("first he asked and then he got..."), time concepts ("many, many years ago..."), spatial concepts ("to mislead his pursuers, he fled north..."). All everyday instructions contain mediation—for example, "Pick up the hot saucepan carefully with two hands and watch what you are doing" (mediation for planning and precision); "Don't answer immediately, think first!" (mediation for behavior control); "When you make yourself a cup of coffee, please ask the people in the room if they want one" (mediation for sharing behavior). As we are all products of mediation, our deficiencies are products of a lack of mediation. Therefore, learning and thinking skills can be reconstructed or taught using compensatory and complementary mediation.

This leads us to the question of inclusion. To us, inclusion in regular society is not just a right but also the best restorative and advancing environment there can be for people with special needs. The reason for this is that it is the best intensively mediating environment. Mainstreamed children are exposed to live models of norma-



**Inclusion in regular society is not just a right but also the best restorative and advancing environment there can be for people with special needs.**

tive speech, normative rules of behavior, normative play, and normative learning habits. They are required to obey instructions normally, to listen to one instruction given to thirty students rather than just to a personal instruction. In a special environment they are exposed to homogeneous but not normative surroundings where they receive mediation for negative content rather than normative content.

However, the difference between the special environment and the inclusion environment is not just related to the quality of mediation but also to the intensity of mediation. Mainstreamed children exist in the boisterous, noisy atmosphere of normative children, and they are besieged by so many positive stimuli. This positive onslaught has an impact on the ability of the positive content to permeate the cognitive

system of mainstreamed children. Often special needs children find it difficult to open up to mediation from the environment. The parents talk to the children normatively but they find it difficult to imitate them. It's too little and too quiet. Even speech therapy sessions, which at

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 8]

**[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7]**

best are given a few times a week, are too few to bring about the desired change.

In short, in a normative environment the children's modifiability exposes them to normative and intensive stimuli and it acts to bring about the desired change in the children's understanding and behavior.

**“It is our claim that mainstreaming schools strengthen teachers. Mainstreaming teachers are active teachers who fight for the success of their students even when they detect a difficulty.”**

The second question is, even if we were to assume that mainstreaming benefits special needs children, can we still be sure that it does not impair their regular classmates? Does it not harm parents' and teachers' aspirations to excellence? Could inclusion of special needs children in regular classes lower the study pace and level?

The introduction in schools of the "medical model" for student evaluation has had the effect of weakening teachers. Any student with a difficulty is sent for evaluation, is labeled "learning deficient" in some way or another, receives treatment of some sort or another (in the mild cases) or is removed completely or partially from the regular class (in the more serious cases). Statistics talk of 25-30% children in regular classes as having being tagged "learning deficient." Now, parents of "regular" children have to ask themselves which teachers they want for their children when they develop some sort of difficulty. Thinking about the fact that children can develop a difficulty for one subject and not necessarily another, we will certainly discover that there are no "regular" children, that all children at any given time and as a result of personal or family circumstances could develop a learning difficulty even if it is not evaluated and defined.

It is our claim that mainstreaming schools

strengthen teachers. Mainstreaming teachers are active teachers who fight for the success of their students even when they detect a difficulty. Mainstreaming teachers (under the right and optimal conditions) are teachers who receive guidance and who become more expert in dealing with learning difficulties. They are used to mustering strength to deal with the mission, in three critical ways:

they perceive their role as being primarily responsible for the success and the inclusion of all the children in the class, even those who have shown difficulty; they are able to muster the emotional strength to stand up to the complex educational tasks before them; they accumulate knowledge and experience in this field. All the children in the class benefit from the changes that come about in the teachers.

The third question: Are not mainstreamed children condemned to extreme social isolation caused by other children re-

**“Being educated means possessing values of kindness and generosity, and this is the profound meaning of the verse “The world is built on acts of kindness” (Psalms 89:2).”**

jecting them? The children's inclusion is very important to the other students. After all, each one of us parents will, we hope and pray, live to an old age and find it more difficult to walk, have slow reactions, etc., and each one of us could one day have "special needs." So what is the attitude that we would like to see from our children towards people with special needs? Being educated does not just mean accumulating knowledge. Being educated means possessing values of kindness and generosity, and this is the profound meaning of the verse

"The world is built on acts of kindness" (Psalms 89:2). Kindness is not an attribute without which one can live. Every one of us needs kindness at some time so our children must acquire this trait from a very early age.

Therefore inclusion is not just "geographical"; it must comprise active steps to include the children socially. I include some examples from my own personal life. We arranged for "break-time duty" during which two classmates played with our son. His "shadow" was instructed to initiate games including other children and other social opportunities. The other children, for their own part, learned to make contact with the Down syndrome child and to consider him "one of theirs." After all, he really was "one of theirs." Needless to say, those situations taught our son how to act normatively and made it possible for him to fit into a youth movement and into the community as an equal.

The fourth question: What will guarantee the success of the mainstreamed child in school study? One of the important (but not sole) conditions for the success of mainstreamed children is their preparation for school study during the course of their studies. The Feuerstein Institute in Jerusalem operates a large center that prepares young children for mainstreaming. The work

paradigm (which we export to a great many countries) is based on the following principles:

1. Emphasis on mediation to enhance the child's intelligence and particularly his/her learning potential with an aim to ensuring the most possibly efficient learning process.
2. Emphasis on receptive and mainly expressive speech skills to guarantee regular communication of the mainstreamed child with classmates.

3. Emphasis on group learning habits including focusing on the major stimulus (the teacher) and the ability to understand that an instruction given to the entire class is aimed at him/her too.
4. Emphasis on teaching reading and writing skills.

Our methodology puts heavy emphasis on learning and thinking. Their modification constitutes, in our opinion, the modification of a person's overall personality as behavior and motivation and even motor abilities are influenced by a person's thinking and learning skills.

The fifth question: How can we determine if the child is suitable for inclusion? Where? When? We use a dynamic evaluation process called the Learning Propensity Assessment Device (LPAD). This cognitive-dynamic evaluation process is aimed at appraising students' learning potential rather than just their actual condition. This makes possible the production of a personal learning profile for individual students and gives pointers for their optimal learning methods. It also offers detailed mapping of the subjects' deficient and normal cognitive functions and allows focusing on their specific correction with an aim to guaranteeing the efficiency of their learning and thinking processes. A great many students go astray purely because assessments hasten to tag them without considering their tremendous latent potential to change and study. This evaluation process is implemented in many countries and it shows that latent in the underachievers there is enormous potential that for varied reasons has not been brought to fruition.

The sixth question: Is there methodicalness in advancing the intelligence of people with special needs or all sorts of learning difficulties? Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment Program enhances thinking and learning skills by addressing a very wide range of cognitive operations such as understanding instructions, comparison, analysis and synthesis, categorization, logic inference, perception, time management, and precision. The method uses the

technique of "mediated learning," which gives teachers and caregivers powerful and methodical tools to teach students learning and thinking strategies.

This program is even taught to "regular" schoolchildren to help them acquire a command of their own learning and thinking processes, for the absurd thing is that schools in the Western world teach everything except one basic skill—learning how to learn and think. This is left to chance. We teach our

**A great many students go astray purely because assessments hasten to tag them without considering their tremendous latent potential to change and study.**

students subject matter which will no longer be relevant when they leave school, but we fail to teach them how to update their knowledge efficiently in a rapidly changing world.

The seventh question: With all the interventions and the planning, could there still be a disparity between the mainstreamed child and the required level in the regular class, particularly regarding students with more severe developmental problems such as Down syndrome, autism or severe learning difficulties?

This is an entirely legitimate question and the Feuerstein method offers several answers to it in the context of advancement inclusion:

1. The preparation and support of mainstreamed children includes pre-study in the more difficult subjects enabling the child to come to lessons relatively prepared thereby enhancing his/her assimilation of the material.
2. In particularly challenging cases, priorities have to be selected and one or two subjects chosen for removal so the student's course load does not become too heavy.
3. We recommend not rushing. In particularly challenging cases, we recommend not promoting the child to the

next class, sometimes even several times in his/her school career. The objective here is twofold:

To allow children another year to go over the material, giving them a chance to reinforce the subject matter and to acquire further learning skills without being inundated with new content. The more challenged the child, the more need there is to consider repeating a class to allow the child to catch up. Otherwise

**A great many students go astray purely because assessments hasten to tag them without considering their tremendous latent potential to change and study.**

one could find children presenting a study gap that they are unable to make up, and they may need to terminate inclusion.

To allow the child time for further emotional and social maturing. Many parents and teachers fear that holding mainstreamed children back will harm them socially. We say that often the opposite is true—leaving children in a lower class for another year helps them to improve their emotional and social skills.

4. The most important principle is that inclusion is not just a geographical act—it is an educational one with the purpose of improving the level of thinking and functioning of mainstreamed children. Therefore, it is very important to train and prepare teachers, teachers' aides, administrators and social workers for inclusion.

The eighth question: What are the underlying advantages of inclusion, beyond the academic aspect? Inclusion has several goals without which success cannot be attained:

1. Setting realistic goals for the child. In special education the children are "wrapped in cotton wool," placed in an environment that adjusts edu-

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 24]

# Special Education in Jewish Day Schools: Lessons from the Public School Experience

■ by **ALAN OLIFF**

**I**N 1989, I experienced a major shift in my thinking about educational practices for serving students with special educational needs. As the special education administrator in a Boston-area public school system, I thought existing practice, that included separate educational settings for some students, was “best practice.”

At that time public schools were implementing an evolving federal mandate to create “least restrictive” programs for students with special needs, in contrast to the conventional wisdom that these students would be most successful when educated in separate classrooms with other students like them. In the early years after the law was passed, the focus was on creating new programs within the public school buildings to serve populations that had not been served in public schools before. Most of these new programs continued to be separate, albeit now located in close proximity to regular school programs. Over the following years, a growing number of students were placed in these separate special education programs with limited integration in general school settings following the notion that most mainstream classrooms were not the right settings for children with different abilities. While there remained lingering concern that the additional resources required for public special education programs might impact the overall school program quality, the mandate prevailed and the required resources became simply a fact of life for the public school administration.

It was in this context that the parents of a child with developmental disabilities stunned me by requesting he be placed in a regular classroom at their neighborhood school, rather than in a special education classroom in a school across town. I was taken aback. No one had ever before suggested to me that a student with such cognitive challenges could succeed in a “regular” class. While today, public schools are widely successful in integrating a very broad range of learners in their classrooms, at that time, most public school special education professionals were proud of the new separate programs, generally located in elementary or secondary schools with limited “mainstreaming” components.

It was a pivotal moment for me. My conservative administrative head wanted to dismiss the idea as untenable, while my instincts were to consider how it might be possible. It would be easier to continue along the well established “equal but mostly separate” road for students with special needs. However, I started to question the prevailing practice and began to reflect on my own actions and beliefs. Moreover, these parents forced me to ask the question, “Why not?”

I realize that this transformation was a logical extension of my development as an educator. At the time it was a jolt and an uncomfortable self-reckoning about how

I had been operating as a special education teacher and administrator for the first 15+ years of my career in public education. That moment and much of my



*Alan Oliff is Director of the Initiative for Day School Excellence at the Combined Jewish Philanthropies in Boston, Massachusetts. He can be reached at [alano@cjp.org](mailto:alano@cjp.org).*

work thereafter as a school leader was informed by asking that “Why not” question many times over.

When I started to work two years ago in the Boston area Jewish day school community, I was quickly confronted with some of the same issues from my early public school administration days. As the director of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) Initiative for Day School Excellence, one of my key responsibilities has been to oversee a major project on improving practices for special needs programs in Boston area Jewish day schools. Quite honestly, this challenge was an important reason why I decided to take the position. I was intrigued by the great interest in special education and more importantly the passion that was evident in this community-wide effort.

My initial impressions left me both energized and concerned. It was clear that the community and the Boston-area day schools had taken positive steps to create improved supports and serve a broader range of students. Through a strong partnership between CJP and a visionary and supportive funder (Ruderman Family Foundation), the Boston area Jew-



ish day schools special education initiative had developed and great changes were in progress. More students with special needs were being served and many of the schools were invested in this work. However, it was also clear that practices were still in the formative stages and in some ways resembled practices from my earlier “separate but equal” public school days. Schools were developing new staffing patterns and infrastructures for supporting students. A Jewish special education regional support agency (Gateways) was in its early stages of development for providing services to the area day schools and other Jewish educational programs.

While Gateways and Boston’s day schools were leading examples of change in serving students with a range of learning abilities, in the day school context there is no legal mandate to do so. The legal

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**In my view, schools should strive to serve as many students as possible. Schools should focus on how its programs can achieve this goal rather than on the deficiencies of the children.**

mandate had compelled public schools to change even though they were not sure how to do it. In recent years it has been suggested that our Jewish communities have a *moral* mandate to make Jewish day schools accessible to all. Should we educate all students in our Jewish day schools? Or instead, is a Jewish day school best viewed as an independent school that should define who it can serve and stay with its successful formula? Does a Jewish day school have an obligation to contribute to a communal effort to maximize the involvement of students who wish to partake in this Jewish educational option?

These questions about Jewish day schools remind me of the issues raised in the public education context a number of years ago; some concerns impeded progress while others enabled breakthroughs for new thinking and practice. It is important that we find ways to open up a dialogue across the Jewish day school community about how we best support all students in our programs and what we might learn from each other as we conceptualize the most effective and accessible Jewish education options for all of our students and families. Hopefully we can learn from the public school experience as we create best

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 12]

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11]

practice in Jewish day schools in Boston and elsewhere.

In my view, schools should strive to serve as many students as possible. Schools should focus on *how* its programs can achieve this goal rather than on the deficiencies of the children. I am not an absolutist about a “one way” model for making this happen; however, I do believe this conceptual framework can be used as a foundation for considering the questions and ideas that will be raised herein. I will also confess that my experience on this journey has led to a deeply seated belief that too often concerns are raised in order to dismiss a more inclusionary approach before even considering that such an approach might be the best for all of our children. In fact, the experience in public schools and in Jewish day schools committed to the possibilities of integrated practice has confirmed that many of our students with special needs can be educated alongside peers if school communities are willing to open themselves to new ideas and practice. High performance standards need not be diminished in making our schools work for all students. Schools that successfully serve a diverse population of learners can become models for how we want our Jewish community to evolve in the future.

Undeniably, there are very difficult hurdles that exist in creating more inclusive Jewish day schools and communities. It will not be an easy road to find ways to establish a real sense of belonging for an ever broader range of students. As we approach these challenging issues I want to suggest a few ideas for consideration in hopes that they spark further discussion and ideas.

## ESTABLISH A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH FOR SERVING ALL LEARNERS

If a school (public or private) creates a culture of inclusion and a set of professional practices for all staff, then the long-term outlook for creating successful practices will be significantly advanced. While the impact of federal and state public mandates for serving students with special needs were thought to cre-

ate some of the most profound changes in 20th century US education, initial implementation relied heavily on special education expertise outside “general education” practice and operations. It took many years after establishment of the public school mandates for the field to recognize that the responsibility for serving students with a wide range of abilities was a *whole school* responsibility.

In Jewish day schools, we can avoid this longstanding public school issue. We have an opportunity to utilize special education expertise in the context of whole school responsibility. That means that school heads and school boards recognize the responsibility to actively determine how the whole school will practice and to make this a central piece of the school’s core values.

## CREATE A COORDINATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT APPROACH FOCUSED ON TEACHING AND LEARNING EFFECTIVENESS

Too often schools move from one initiative to another without thinking about the total sum of the impact. Professional development becomes single topic focused programs or sessions (e.g., cooperative learning, technology integration, global education, etc.) that do not persist in the ongoing professional discussions of school teams and the whole school. In terms of improving practice for serving all learners, a good professional development plan should incorporate knowledge development about best teaching and learning practice as well as ongoing reflective practice discussions to enable modifications to existing practice. In addition, targeted special education professional development programs linked to real work in classrooms is important as part of the knowledge base for serving students with learning challenges.

## DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR INCREASING THE REVENUE FLOW FOR SERVING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS

Let’s be honest, it is going to cost more money to do this. Increases in the number of staff, professional development,

and unanticipated expenses will add to the expenses of the school. Today many day school families pay for special education services above and beyond the costs of tuition. Numerous day schools have staff who serve students with learning needs. The reality is that the cost of school tuition and these additional expenses are likely to increase in the years ahead. This challenge is both an individual school and day school community issue. A couple of ideas:

1. Make sure all existing public funds are being accessed (e.g., Title I, transportation reimbursement, direct special education services in some states, etc.)
2. Consider establishing a community special education affordability plan for families
3. Partner with foundations to support innovative programs; if possible, focus on areas that can be sustained and/or will not need to be sustained when funding ends
4. Work with other faith-based partners to improve the flow of funds for serving students in non-public school settings

While public schools (boards, administrators, and faculty) eventually accepted the notion that serving all students was an important part of the landscape, early practice led to a set of beliefs and practices that created separate programs for serving children with special needs. It has taken years for public schools to adopt integrated approaches for serving all students. As Jewish day schools wrestle with how to improve practice and create options for a broader range of students, we can learn from the public school experience and avoid some of the obstacles that impeded progress along the way. Let us commit to working together, within and across communities, to create the best possible Jewish educational options for all of our children and families. It is essential that we take on an approach that will result in positive integrated educational opportunities for future generations of students in our day schools. ■

# GOT CHALLENGE?

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#### **Eligibility Requirements**

- Be directed by an active, voluntary, local board of directors or trustees whose sole function is the stewardship of the school and that establishes and monitors the implementation of appropriate financial standards.
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- Serve a minimum of three grades (K-12) with a minimum of 50 students above kindergarten.
- Actively pursue standards of excellence in both Judaic and general studies programs.
- Value the State of Israel by attesting to the following statement: "The creation of the State of Israel is one of the seminal events in Jewish history. Recognizing the significance of the State and its national institutions, we seek to instill in our students an attachment to the State of Israel as well as a sense of responsibility for its welfare."
- Have tax-exempt status.

#### **Schedule**

Webinars:	TBD
Submission forms available:	April 1, 2011
Deadline for submission:	November 1, 2011
Award announcement:	December 21, 2011 (first day of Hanukkah)

#### **For More Information**

A list of FAQs will be available on the PEJE website on March 1, 2011

**Email:** [award@peje.org](mailto:award@peje.org)  
**Call:** 617.367.0001 x162

# To Include or Not?

## The Day School Dilemma

■ by BEVERLY BERNSTEIN

**I**s inclusion a legal “right” in Jewish day schools? According to IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), students with disabilities have a right to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE). Local public schools districts have an obligation to test students with special needs enrolled in a public school and develop an IEP (individual educational plan) to be implemented in the public school classroom. Parents who choose to leave the public school arena and enroll in a Jewish day school cannot expect the day school to follow through on the IEP. There is no legal basis for a day school to implement any recommendations written on an IEP. There might be, however, some exceptions. A student placed in a day school by the local school district can have an IEP implemented in that setting by the school district, or IEP services might be provided on the premises of the local public school with the parents usually responsible for bringing the child there at the time provided to access these services.

If there is no legal basis for inclusion in day schools, should these schools address the needs of the moderate to severe learning disabled, of those on the higher end of the autistic spectrum, of children with moderate to severe ADHD, and of children with mild to moderate developmental disabilities? Proponents of inclusion say children with disabilities have a right to be afforded equal educational opportunities and should not be denied based on disability. But will equal educational opportunities teach these children in a manner in which they can learn? Inclusion allows children with special needs to socialize with their peers and reduces social stigma. If we look at the student as a “whole” child, we cannot minimize the importance of socialization.

Critics of inclusion say that full inclusion takes away valuable resources needed by the child. They also say that few regular education teachers are trained for full inclusion. Special education teachers are trained in approaching educational tasks with flexibility. If one method is not working they can quickly change to another method within the curriculum. They must have the various strategies and techniques needed to help their students learn content area material. The pace of a special education classroom is different, and more reinforcement of cumulative material is done.

Should Jewish day schools open their doors to inclusion? The best way to answer this question is to ask what type of inclusion we’re talking about. Are we including

moderate to severely challenged students into the mainstream classrooms, expecting the teacher to meet their needs? Or are we including self-contained classes into a mainstream school where the child with special needs has a chance to socialize with typical peers? Additionally, we have to ask what the goals of inclusion should be in a Jewish day school. Is it just to embrace the child Jewishly and make



**Beverly Bernstein** is Educational Director of OROT, the special needs initiative in Philadelphia's Jewish day schools. She can be reached at [bbernstein@orotkids.org](mailto:bbernstein@orotkids.org).

him feel he is a valued member of our people, or to maximize the child’s academic potential so he can be a productive member of society?

The rigors and demands of a two language curriculum and the stress of getting through the yearly curriculum make it very difficult to include the child with special needs into mainstream classes even with in-class support. Most often the pace of the curriculum and the presentation of material is done with the typical child in mind. There is simply no time for the review and reinforcement needed to appropriately educate the child with special needs. To put a moderately to severely challenged student in such a learning environment would be counterproductive.

If a Jewish day school believes all Jewish children deserve a Jewish education the school is then responsible to provide an academic environment which is conducive for learning and meeting the needs of its students. Many day schools today have instituted academic self contained classes with social inclusion. In this mod-

el students are taught all academic subjects in a separate classroom with a special needs teacher and included with typical peers in all non-academic areas. Students with special needs have their academic challenges met in self contained classrooms while given opportunities to socialize with their typical peers. Pedagogically, this type of program meets the academic and social needs of the child, providing him or her with all that is needed for a solid Jewish and secular education on his level.

This type of program, however, is costly. It means, at the very minimum, hiring at least one special needs teacher for Judaic studies and one for Secular studies and buying materials and manipulatives to enhance the learning experience. Class size needs to be kept to a minimum in order to individualize as much as possible. Many day schools charge extra tuition for this programming. With day school tuition already out of reach for many people, is it feasible for day schools to implement this form of inclusion? Obviously, this is a question each school has to answer for itself, but there are day schools who feel strongly about this issue and who make special education another budget line to incorporate into fundraising plans.

Accepting children with special needs into a day school environment should be a group decision. Boards of directors and administrators must feel strongly about including all types of learners because this attitude filters down to the faculty, students, and parents. With the academic self contained social inclusion model, day schools can say they are following the dictum of “educate a child according to his way” (Proverbs 22:6). Typical learners are getting what they need and children with special needs are getting what they need. That’s called fair!

Then there are those, parents and teachers alike, who are afraid the quality of education will diminish once the Jewish day school starts to admit children with any type of special needs. Perhaps if administrators carefully construct the curriculum for the child with special needs to reflect that the special needs teacher is in charge of educating the child, this stigma may, in time, recede. The mainstream teacher may be asked to incorporate the child with special needs into the typical classroom, perhaps accompanied by the special needs teacher. Once the mainstream teachers are comfortable working alongside their special needs counterparts, parents may come to see that education is not diminished but enhanced! Parents in day schools that follow the academic self contained social inclusion model have seen the benefit of this model on typical children who learn patience, kindness, acceptance and tolerance for those who may be perceived as different.

The challenges for some type of inclusion in a Jewish day school environment seem daunting but they are surmountable. There are many schools who have found a way to overcome the obstacles in providing a quality education for children with special needs. In the words of John F. Kennedy, “All of us do not have equal talent, but all of us should have an opportunity to develop our talent.” ■



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# Funding Special Education: New Opportunities

■ by GAIL NORRY

**F**UNDING for special needs programs in Jewish day schools is challenging on two fronts. It is difficult enough to provide quality education for a dual curriculum at an affordable price, but, it is that much more expensive and difficult to educate children with special needs with appropriate resources. It is also our duty and obligation to do so; as Gandhi stated, "Society is judged by the way it takes care of its most vulnerable members." If we are to infuse Jewish values throughout our schools and extended community, we need our schools to be accessible in every way: open and affordable, to all types of learners.

Donors today are often passionate about giving to specific causes, especially if they affect individuals closest to them. Communities that have met with the greatest success in developing special needs programs in their local day schools had families with a commitment to day school education and a child who needed additional support to attend. In cities such as Miami, Chicago and Philadelphia, special needs programs were started by families who wanted a program for their own children, as well as others in the community, and were willing to be a driving force behind getting it started. Each community's program operates a little differently, but in each case, the families partnered with their local Federation and existing day schools to begin the program. They were willing to raise funds from their own circle of family and friends, as well as from family foundations in their communities. In addition, host schools and the local Federations helped the programs leverage their resources.

Aside from local initiatives, the Jewish Funders Network recently held a conference for philanthropists interested in supporting special needs programs on the national level. It was very well attended, and there will also be a track focusing on special needs at their annual conference this March in Philadelphia. This is a wonderful opportunity for a group of funders to work together toward creating a greater impact in this arena.

Another example of collaboration between funders has surfaced in Philadelphia. A strategic, broadly focused venture philanthropy program (VPP) has been created by a small group of individuals and family foundations. The VPP represents a group of entrepreneurially minded Jewish philanthropists in the region who are committed to working collaboratively to develop strategic and holistic solutions to problems dra-

matically affecting the Jewish community that are not currently being adequately addressed. The VPP accomplishes this by providing initial seed funding for new initiatives or helping to enhance and grow existing promising efforts. Regarding special needs, the VPP would like to create a continuum of services in the Jewish community for individuals, from the time they are diagnosed throughout



**Gail Norry** is Co-chair of the Center for Jewish Life & Learning at the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia. She can be reached at [gsnorry@mac.com](mailto:gsnorry@mac.com).

adulthood. A partnership like the VPP could be helpful in providing seed money for a program in Jewish day schools or summer camps, as well as vocational services and other supportive measures.

A larger group of investors can have a tremendous impact in the special needs arena by forging bonds with existing service providers in the community and filling in the

**“ Communities that have met with the greatest success...had families with a commitment to day school education and a child who needed additional support to attend.**

gaps where necessary. For example, the Jewish Family and Children's Service has social workers on staff that can be resources to families with a special needs child in a Jewish day school. The Jewish Employment and Vocational Services can provide vocational expertise at the high school or college level. Many of these services are

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 39]

# Report from the Jewish Court of All Time

Last fall on Masada, Anne Frank had an exchange with Queen Isabella of Spain about the qualities of a good leader:

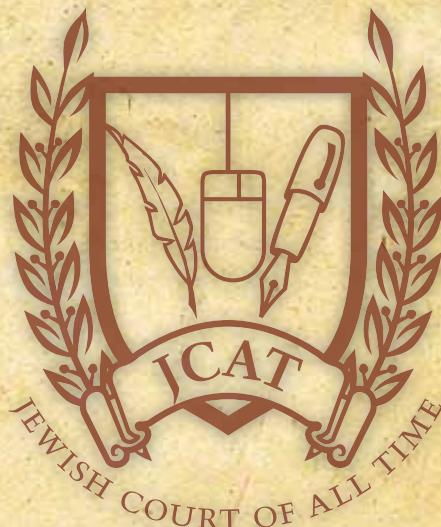
*Queen Isabella: You must realize that not all leaders act as this man you call Hitler. We as leaders must make sacrifices and do what is necessary for our people. I wonder, have you ever considered the choices that leaders have to make and why they decide to do what they do? It is not as easy as you think my dear.*

*Anne Frank: I don't really know who you are but your title is QUEEN, so you must think that you have some type of authority. Have you ever thought that people wanted a say in what they did with their own lives?*

“Masada,” in this case, was the website for the Jewish Court of All Time (JCAT), a program that engaged 175 students at 8 RAVSAK middle schools this past fall, including:

- Abraham Joshua Heschel Day School (Northridge, CA)
- Bnai Shalom Day School (Greensboro, NC)
- David Posnack Hebrew Day School (Plantation, FL)
- El Paso Jewish Academy (El Paso, TX)
- Jewish Day School of Metropolitan Seattle (Bellevue, WA)
- N. E. Miles Jewish Day School (Birmingham, AL)
- Paul Penna Downtown Jewish Day School (Toronto, ON)
- Rockwern Academy (Cincinnati, OH)

Funded by a grant from the Covenant Foundation, JCAT represents a collaboration between RAVSAK, the Interactive Communications and Simula-



tions (ICS) group at the University of Michigan, and the University of Cincinnati’s Center for the Study of Jewish Education and Culture.

Students in the simulation took on the role of historical characters to decide the fate of Suleiman Eissa and his family, fictional Darfuri refugees seeking asylum in Israel. Should Israel, a homeland for those who escaped tyranny and genocide, be obligated to admit this family? Or is it permissible for Israel, like any modern nation state, to deny their request on economic, political, or other grounds?

In preparation for the trial, students posted resumes based on research of their characters. They then engaged in discussions of topics like the one above in which a student (Anne Frank) debated leadership with a university mentor (Queen Isabella). The simulation took place on a password-protected website created uniquely for JCAT and modeled on the various social networking spaces that more and more students use in their daily lives.

What was the impact of JCAT? Teachers reported that when their students were speaking in character, they were not as

concerned with appearances and were much more willing to take stands and express their viewpoints. Students also developed “historical empathy,” the ability to separate their own views from those who lived at other times, and to better understand how and why people act as they do.

Not only did JCAT bring the past to life, it helped students develop skills for handling real-world issues they may confront as Jews. As a teacher from David Posnack Hebrew Day School wrote,

*Our decision was to align our students’ character choices with our curriculum, which is the study of the Holocaust. We had several students who were interested in portraying negative individuals. We were amazed at the maturity and intelligence of their analysis of these individuals. The students started to understand the thought process that would lead someone to be so hateful of others. In our class discussions, students who would ordinarily be reticent spoke out and refuted arguments made by anti-Semites. They are learning how to deal with the [Henry] Fords and [Joseph] Kennedys of the world.*

To support the teachers in the project, JCAT faculty at the Universities of Michigan and Cincinnati met monthly with teachers via web-conference calls, and led weekly discussions on a private message forum. These exchanges allowed teachers to discuss how the simulation was proceeding, to reflect on their practice, and to raise questions and address problems as they arose.

The second round of the simulation will take place next fall with four additional schools joining the eight that participated this year. For information or to apply, contact Dr. Elliott Rabin at [elliott@ravak.org](mailto:elliott@ravak.org).

# Raising Awareness, Changing Attitudes: The Time Is Now

■ by **DORI FRUMIN KIRSHNER** and **MEREDITH ENGLANDER POLSKY**

**H**OURTEEN years ago, while working at an overnight Jewish summer camp, I (Dori) met a boy named Josh. Josh was 8 years old and struggled with learning disabilities and attention issues that impacted his interactions with other people. Although he loved camp and tried hard to fit in, Josh was asked to leave eight days after he arrived. Months later, I called a friend of mine who was a teacher at the Jewish day school Josh attended. When I asked my friend how Josh was doing, he responded that he didn't know: Josh had been asked to leave the school. Where would Josh's committed Jewish family turn next? Would they even remain a committed Jewish family?

The Learning Disabilities Association of America reports that 15% of the population has a learning disability. 1 in 110 individuals—of that, 1 in 70 boys—is diagnosed with autism. Approximately 988,000 children in the US are Jewish. Although the Jewish community has not done a full census for this information, it is safe to assume that the Jewish population mirrors the general population; minimally, 150,000 school-aged Jewish children grapple with some form of disability. People say that change in the Jewish community will only occur once a critical mass has been reached. As professionals who are completely committed to the Jewish future, we all must look at these numbers and understand that the critical mass has indeed been achieved. For Jewish educators, the tipping point is here.

As secular American educational institutions are making leaps and bounds in their efforts to accommodate students of diverse learning capabilities, our Jewish educational settings lag behind. Faculty lack specialized training, background knowledge or the tools to best serve students with special needs. Our Jewish educational institutions bend under the pressure to provide high quality education to the majority of students. The needs of the many trump the needs of the few. Families are turned away again and again from a Jewish education they so desperately want and their children deserve. This far-too common occurrence is unacceptable and is avoidable.

Conversations about including children with special needs in Jewish education often quickly turn into a discussion about money. How can we possibly afford inclusion? With the previously cited percentages, we would argue that the real question is, how can we afford *not* to include these children and their families? While we recognize that there is a financial component to having the proper resources in place to accommodate

all learners, we feel strongly that the major barrier has much more to do with attitude. As a community, we must reach the point where we all see the absurdity in picking and choosing which types of children are entitled to a Jewish education, which families are welcomed into the fabric of Jewish life and which ones are relegated to watch from the sidelines. So how do we



**Dori Frumin Kirshner**, Executive Director of Matan, holds a master's degree in Jewish education, is a former day school and Hebrew school teacher and Federation professional, and is the parent of a day school student. She can be reached at [dori@matankids.org](mailto:dori@matankids.org).



**Meredith Englander Polsky**, Special Needs Coordinator, co-founder of Matan and parent of a day school student, holds master's degrees in special education and social work and has extensive experience in formal and informal Jewish education. She can be reached at [meredith@matankids.org](mailto:meredith@matankids.org).

get there? Here are several suggestions for the consideration of day school leadership.

1. Have a strong grasp on how your school currently approaches special needs. Is there a stated school policy? What does it say? Does your school have a specific system of accommodations in place for children who learn differently? Do you have open dialogue with your parents about the positives and negatives of how the school is accommodating their children's learning needs? Do you know how many children have been "counseled out" of your school because of special needs?
2. Moving beyond the policies and pop-

ulation of your own school, utilize local Jewish agencies to understand the larger community. Familiarize yourself with the resources in your area and find out where gaps in service exist. What percentage of families send their children to Jewish day school? What percentages of families have a child with special needs? Of those, how

many have been turned away from day school education, or would be interested in that education if they thought it was available to them?

3. With all of this information in hand, understand that the best solutions are often those that take a communal approach. Not every school has

to become an expert in every type of learning need. In geographical regions where more than one Jewish day school exists, create teams of internal leaders who are committed to addressing this issue. Think about which schools are in the best position to accommodate different types of learners. Create ac-

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 36]



## Los Angeles Leadership Celebration

**O**n Saturday evening, February 5, 2011, RAVSAK celebrated the growth and success of the Jewish community day schools of Greater Los Angeles. Graciously hosted at the home of Betty and Ross

Winn, more than 50 lay leaders from different RAVSAK schools joined together as one community to recognize their own achievements as well as to learn about RAVSAK's work and the impact it has on the broader field



Lisa Lainer-Fagan



Board member Matt Heilicher; Board member and reception co-host Rebekah Farber



Jeff Lainer, Lynne Lainer, and Stacy Palbaum



Alyce de Toledo; Executive Director Marc Kramer; and host and head of school Betty Winn

of Jewish education. The evening's speakers included the event hosts—RAVSAK board member Rebekah Farber; RAVSAK board member and head of school of New Community Jewish High School, Dr. Bruce Powell; and former Executive Committee member and head of school of Abraham Joshua Heschel Day School, Betty Winn—as well as RAVSAK Board Chair Arnee Winshall and Executive Director Dr. Marc Kramer. Speakers reflected on the importance of Jewish day school education and noted some of the critical ways that RAVSAK has had an impact on their own professional development and their schools. ■



Greg Derin, Howard Farber and Doug Williams



Mark Lainer; Board member Lesley Zafran



Board Chair Arnee Winshall; Deborah Taubman



Board member, head of school and co-host Bruce Powell; Bryan Palbaum; Alyce de Toledo; Philip de Toledo

# The Community Model for Special Education Services

■ by **ARLENE REMZ** and **SUE SCHWEBER**

**E**LEVEN years ago, the challenges faced by special needs students in Jewish day schools were nothing short of daunting. It was an era when many children with special needs either struggled to stay afloat, were accepted only to be “counseled out” later, or were considered “simply not day school material.” Parents who insisted on day school for their children soon discovered that the schools often did not have the special education resources required to meet the needs of students struggling to learn basic skills and also support their teachers to facilitate classroom learning for a variety of learners. In addition, services they could access at their local public school were disconnected from the classroom experience. Frustrations abounded for the teachers, the parents and most of all the children themselves.

In Boston, a small group of parents and educators were disturbed by how many students were falling through the cracks. What was missing in area day schools, they believed, was a team of special education experts working together with the schools, teachers and students. It was a formula they believed held out the best hope for the students who were struggling to stay afloat.

With three day schools on board, the Jewish Special Education Collaborative (JSEC) began sending speech-language pathologists (SLPs), occupational therapists (OTs) and reading/learning specialists into the schools to provide specialized services above and beyond what the school could provide. JSEC had a single goal in mind: providing the services to the students with special needs to keep them in their schools and supporting their teachers. And they had a dream: maybe someday children who otherwise would never have the chance could attend day school.

Six years later, JSEC merged with another grass-roots organization, Etgar L’Noar, which had already established a stand-alone Sunday school, bar/bat mitzvah training program and teen youth group for youngsters with moderate-to-severe needs. Now Gateways: Access to Jewish Education, supported by Boston’s federation, Combined Jewish Philanthropies, the Ruderman Family Foundation and other foundations and private donors, directly serves nearly 200 children with special needs—preschoolers through high schoolers—in ten area day schools and countless more in other Jewish learning settings. This number soars when you add the students impacted by the

professional development and coaching Gateways provides their teachers, helping transform their classrooms into more welcoming places for a wide range of learners.

Today Gateways’ day school program works collaboratively to provide support services above and beyond what the school offers. We employ a cadre of 25 SLPs, OTs, reading/learning and behavior specialists who help to build on-site special education teams. Our staff includes two coordinators who manage services, supervise therapists and ensure communication with the school and parents. We provide professional development for teachers, and in addition, we coach teachers to help make modifica-



**Arlene Remz** (right) is Executive Director of Gateways: Access to Jewish Education in Newton, Massachusetts. **Sue Schweber** (left) is its founding Day School Program Director. They can be reached at [Arlene@jgateways.org](mailto:Arlene@jgateways.org) and [Sue@jgateways.org](mailto:Sue@jgateways.org).

tions and accommodations and differentiate classroom instruction.

Delivering special education services in day schools goes well beyond dealing with students with learning challenges. It’s about providing the best practices for all students, supporting student learning with a team of professionals and giving teachers the tools to deal with a wide range of learners. It’s also about preserving a child’s self-esteem while we’re working together on creating the program that’s right for him or her. Last but not least, it’s about raising other children’s awareness that the student next to them may look or sound or learn differently. And that’s OK.

Each situation demands a unique “for-

mula” of support, the right mix of services allowing each child to thrive. The day school program coordinators play a crucial role in this model, building the team of professionals at the school and collaborating with the existing day school support system. Only by working as a team can we build the open communication and trust needed to foster change together and achieve full integration. Now, when we share strategies with a teacher, it expands her capacity to use those best-practice skills to successfully teach all her students, including those with greater needs. The good news: As your school community builds its team and capacity, you’ll find you’re able to include children with greater learning challenges.

Our schools have learned that using a central agency enables them to build the team efficiently, since few schools could hire the needed specialists directly as well as coordinate and build a program and work with the teachers and school as a whole. Building trust and respect among the educators, agency specialists, parents and students has allowed our agency to become a community resource for the Boston-area day schools.

But in order to really understand what Gateways does, we need to take you into class with us to see what our modifications, accommodations and differentiated instruction actually look like:

Shoshana, a fourth grader, is often crying at lunch or making someone else cry. In the classroom no one wants to be her partner for projects since she is difficult to work with and always forgets to bring her materials. She will be rude to teachers and staff and have no idea why they are angry. Shoshana works with a Gateways SLP on social cognition in a social skills group. Some of the questions they address include, Can you say the same thing to a teacher and a peer? What words should you use and what does your voice communicate? What is body language? How do people expect you to behave? How do your unexpected behaviors make other people feel? In addition, they work on problem-solving skills, including role-playing multiple solutions to problems.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 28]

## Is Your Day School Ready to Welcome a Wide Range of Learners?

- Is your faculty open to implementing classroom practices—differentiated instruction, universal strategies, modifications and accommodations—that will improve learning for all students and increase success for those with special needs?
- Are you willing to carve out time for teachers for meetings, professional development, coaching and collaboration?
- Do you have someone to coordinate your school-based support services?
- Are you able to set aside a budget for professional development?

## Gateways' work with our partner schools rests on the following assumptions:

- All students can learn.
- Student learning is the responsibility of the entire school.
- The school's values embrace serving a wide range of learners and promote those practices.
- Effective education is based on regular and transparent communication between day school administrators and staff and Gateways' staff.
- Student learning is enhanced by collaborative planning and problem-solving leading to the implementation of solutions that are carefully monitored and refined.
- Teachers can solve learning challenges faced by their students when provided with the appropriate time, consultation and coaching as well as administrative and professional development supports that foster their acquisition and use of evidence-based practices.
- Teacher practices that enhance student learning are related to content enhancement, strategy use and differentiated instruction intended to meet students at their individual learning level.
- Effective and efficient student learning requires the development of self-regulation, including the maintenance of motivation to learn.
- Student learning is facilitated by both strategy use and the provision of differentiated instruction within the classroom setting to foster maximal independence and student development.
- Students can be mentored and gain the skills to assume responsibility for their own learning.
- Professional development is key to both faculty development and building school capacity to serve a wide range of learners.
- The schools, the parents and the community, along with Gateways, all take financial responsibility for funding the program.

# A School within a School

■ by LINDA ZIMMERMAN

**I**t is estimated that between 14% and 18% of school-age children in the United States today have some form of learning disability, the majority mild to moderate. Getting the most appropriate and supportive education for the special needs child is a top priority for their families.

Jewish community day schools have an important role to play in this arena. Students with learning disabilities often fall between the cracks in public schools. Even when properly identified, students on the autism spectrum may not be placed in the appropriate learning environment necessary for their academic success. Despite what many may believe, it is often these young people who have the greatest potential to be the future leaders of our communities. Given the proper support and guidance, they often excel academically and become adults committed to the institutions and community that guided them into adulthood.

This is why it is essential for Jewish day schools to create programs to meet the unique needs of learning-disabled students. It is possible for day schools to meet the unique learning needs of children with diagnosed learning disabilities in a cost-effective manner and without compromising the academic standards of the school through a continuum of services that allow all children to receive the support they need in the least restrictive environment possible.

The creation of a “school within a school” can easily accommodate students with language-based mild to moderate learning disabilities and/or children with developmental disabilities. The alternate track may only be needed for the Judaic and Hebrew courses in schools that use Hebrew immersion programs or can accommodate all academic programming. In all cases, the students that participate in the specialized courses should be fully integrated into all electives, specials, schoolwide programming and any other activities offered to the general student body.

The Amit Gar'inim School was created to provide as much inclusion as possible in a day school setting, while also addressing the individual learning styles and needs of children with severe learning problems and other associated sensory difficulties. Gar'inim serves a small, unique population, and therefore functions as an independent school open to the entire Jewish community, while being housed within another Jewish day school. It also provides therapeutic services that are necessary for its students to thrive. While this school program is independent and serves children with greater needs, any school can feasibly create a similar program to serve students whose learning needs are greater than the school currently supports.

A typical day for a Gar'inim student looks no different than that of any other student in the school. The only difference is that they may be in a multi-age classroom for some or all of their academic instruction. Depending on the number of children served, a multi-age classroom may be necessary to control costs. In the classroom, some students may use the very same textbooks along with the rest of the students in their grade level, albeit with modifications in testing, pace of instruction, or assignments. Other students may use alternative texts that teach the same material in a different for-

mat, while still other students may need to work with specialized remedial materials. It is important to acknowledge that all students learn in their own unique ways, and even within these classrooms the special education teacher must be equipped to teach to all types of learners.

When a day school has a Hebrew immersion program where only Hebrew is spoken in Judaic and Hebrew classrooms,



**Linda Zimmerman** is Executive Director of the The Amit Program, a Jewish central agency providing support to children with learning/developmental disabilities and their families in Atlanta, Georgia. She can be reached at [Lzimmerman@amitatlanta.org](mailto:Lzimmerman@amitatlanta.org).

it may be necessary to have an alternate track for students with language-based learning disabilities. While basic modifications and/or accommodations can allow for many students' academic success in the general studies classroom, it may not be possible for the student to succeed in a foreign language. In this case, it might be necessary to offer a simultaneous option for students to learn Judaics and Hebrew in a classroom in which English is the language of instruction. This can also be accomplished in a multi-age room.

The number of students in the parallel classrooms is one of the most important factors for success. Gar'inim serves students with developmental disabilities and therefore limits the class size to five or six children. When serving students with moderate learning disabilities, a class size of up to 10 or 12 students is manageable.

The Gar'inim class uses an integrated curriculum. In addition to daily prayers, children learn about Jewish history and holidays through their daily academic activities. For example, when young children learn about the holiday of Tu Bishvat (the Jewish New Year for Trees),



they learn the customs associated with the holiday and also learned the letters T (trees) and S (seeds). For a science project they plant grass seeds and for math they collect nuts and used them for counting exercises. The students then go on a field trip to the park in order to reinforce and generalize this information for application in other situations.

The teachers in our program have the flexibility to reinforce material repeatedly. Most of the students we serve thrive on structure and repetition. Although there are set times of day put aside by the teachers for academic instruction, the reality is that this kind of reinforcement occurs regularly throughout the school day. The teachers take advantage of every activity planned (or sometimes unplanned) to reinforce what the children have learned.

It is important to note that some students may need the alternate classroom for particular subjects yet not for others. For instance, a student may struggle in the language arts class while having the highest grade in the math class. A successful program will have the flexibility to design a school day that is

most appropriate for each student.

A program we call the Learning Lab provides support to children who are able to remain in a typical classroom for the majority of their academic subjects yet need the assistance from a special educator in a smaller class to be successful in specific subject areas. Oftentimes, the subject requiring the most support is language arts. A student with a language-based learning disability needs to be given tools specific to their learning deficits to allow them to be successful in all other

the rest of the day the student would be able to remain in typical classrooms. Our program also offers “homework hour” twice a week after school in order to provide additional tutorials for specific subject areas as needed.

Providing these alternatives does carry extra costs. Reducing the teacher:student ratio increases the overall cost of the classroom, and there is also an initial outlay for additional materials to enhance student learning. While in an ideal world there would be no separate pay structure within the school

**Given the proper support and guidance, students with special needs often excel academically and become adults committed to the institutions and community that guided them into adulthood.**

classes that rely on reading, spelling and comprehension. The Lab is a separate language arts class that provides all the support listed earlier in this article. The student may need a lab class for language arts or math, or possibly both. However, for

for students who receive different levels of support, this is not always possible. More and more schools have imposed additional fees for these support services. In a full or half day parallel track, families pay a high-

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 24]

**[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23]**

er tuition. When services are offered on an as needed basis it is more difficult to determine the specific costs for each student. We have found that students in the Lab receive enough extra support during the school day that it is reasonable to charge a flat fee for the year for those students who require the extra support services. The fee includes the after school support, whether or not the student participates.

For any of these programs to be successful, there also needs to be a professional development plan in place for the entire staff of the school that focuses on differentiated learning and understanding the emotional and behavioral issues that may arise when serving a more diverse population. When the school administration believes in the abilities of all the students learning in their building, the stage will be set for every child in the school to be successful.

### CLOSING THOUGHTS

The first few years of any new program such as this can be challenging. The community has to be persuaded that such a program is truly needed and beneficial. Parents will need to have trust in the school in order to send their children to a

new program which has yet to establish a history. The school has to be prepared to deal with the attitudes of the parents who chose the school for its high academic standards and fear that the curriculum will be “watered down” once children with learning difficulties are allowed to attend the school. And

tors were readily available to answer their questions, and even to offer advice on all of the children in the classroom, not just those receiving support services. By the middle of the first year, we found that the typical classroom teachers would routinely come into the Gar'inim classrooms in order to borrow material or to

**“When the school administration believes in the abilities of all the students learning in their building, the stage will be set for every child in the school to be successful.”**

the teachers have to be convinced that their workload will not increase with a more diverse population of learners.

These issues should all be addressed through open forums and community education. Teachers, parents and students should have the opportunity to express their concerns, as well as learn of the overall benefits to the school of creating an environment where all are welcome.

In the first year of our program, all initial concerns faded away within the first few weeks. The teachers came to realize that our highly qualified special educa-

ask for advice about a particular student. The attitude shift of the general parent population was also evident as they became aware of the subtle changes taking place in their child’s classrooms that allowed for a more enriched educational environment for all students.

Above all, the students in the school learn a lesson that can only be taught by example, that everyone is created in G-d’s image. Our schools need to actively practice what they preach. It is not enough to teach Jewish values and compassion. We must show by example that each one of us is unique, and shares in the inheritance and shaping of our Jewish future. ■

## The Psychology of Mainstreaming

**[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9]**

cational goals to the child rather than adjusting the child to realistic educational goals that life demands of us. Those who wish their children to be part of the “world” must understand that adaptation to the world is not a sudden process; it is an ongoing process that begins in kindergarten.

2. The transformation of mainstreamed children from perpetually sheltered students into people who face up to their position and even their well-being. Placing children in an extremely sheltered environment impairs their ability to develop an independ-

ent “immune system.” The outside world is not a safe haven; children must be helped to develop abilities to cope with harsh realities.

3. Setting goals for parents and caregivers. The objectives facing the parents of children in special education school settings are low from the very start. There are no expectations that the children will be part of a normative milieu; normative society will have to adapt to their special behavior. By contrast, objectives facing parents of mainstreamed children include changing the children’s behavior to enable them to adapt to regular environments. The children

themselves respond positively to this change in expectations. There is no substitute for such a driving force. It is true that requirements must be adapted to the child’s level and made plausible, but still, the minute children manage to attain one summit, before them looms yet another waiting to be conquered.

In conclusion, the challenges set before children and their parents can act as a powerful motivator, if in fact the child, the parents and the educational setting staff are all given the tools to facilitate successful inclusion. For all those who dream to see their children “there” with everyone, there is no other way. ■

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# What Can Schools Learn from Summer Camps About Special Education?

■ by DAVID SOLOFF, RALPH SCHWARTZ, and LINDA HOFFENBERG

**J**EWSH camp works as an educational experience. What can schools learn from camps?

This mantra echoes across many conversations, from kiddush after shul to board of education meetings to thoughtful conversation among educators looking for fresh ideas and models of educational success to refresh and renew areas of practice.

What is it that draws the conversation to camp success? First, there is a growing awareness of Jewish camps and the powerful Jewish impact these programs are making on campers. Second, we must consider contributing factors like setting (rural and beautiful), time of year (summer) and access to national resources for both staff and programs. However, at the heart of the matter, it comes down to this: for the best camps, the success is in Jewish community building. Supporting that community are strong friendships, joyful Jewish living through song, dance, arts, and athletic challenge, peer-led programming and religious expression as well as engagement with Israeli peers as fellow campers and staff members.

Is there a niche in this world for the special needs camper, and is anything transferable to the year-round school setting?

The network of Ramah camps includes special needs programs at seven camps across North America. While general camp registration is regionalized, special needs registration is open to the entire North American Jewish community based on the profile of each camper. Each Ramah camp focuses on a segment of the special needs spectrum and collaborates across the Ramah movement to place the camper applicant in the program that best suits the camper.

The Tikvah program of Camp Ramah in Wisconsin serves campers with learning and social difficulties including Asperger syndrome. Current participants in the Tikvah program live in the Midwest, Canada, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Several of these campers are day school students. Many attend local religious schools and participate in youth group programs.

How does Camp Ramah in Wisconsin build community? Who is included in the community? Former Tikvah counselor Adam Broms explains:

*Campers in Tikvah often have a hard time fitting in at home, may not have many friends, and are seldom given the chance to fully develop socially or Jewishly. At camp, Tikvah provides a safe space for them to feel accepted, develop friendships and explore Judaism in ways they cannot elsewhere. Tikvah gives campers individual attention to develop their so-*

*cial and vocational skills while integrating them into the broader camp community.*

*The program highlights a very important value: that each individual has something*



**Rabbi David Soloff** is Executive Director of Camp Ramah in Wisconsin. He can be reached at [dsoloff@ramahwisconsin.com](mailto:dsoloff@ramahwisconsin.com).



**Ralph Schwartz** has directed the Tikvah Program of Camp Ramah in Wisconsin since 2006 and works as a social worker at Daniel Webster Middle School in Waukegan, Illinois. He can be reached at [rschwartz10@gmail.com](mailto:rschwartz10@gmail.com).



**Linda Hoffenberg** is Director of Institutional Advancement at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin. She can be reached at [lhoffenberg@ramahwisconsin.com](mailto:lhoffenberg@ramahwisconsin.com).

*to learn and contribute, and that every individual should have an opportunity for that discovery and expression.*

*As a Tikvah staff member for three years, I experienced first-hand the power of this incredible program. Facilitating these experiences provided me an opportunity for my own discovery. The program encouraged me to rethink my approach to communication and collaboration. I pushed myself to find alternative methods for group development and new approaches to prob-*

*lem solving. My experience became not just about my campers' growth, but also about my own.*

*The impact is felt around the camp and well beyond the end of the summer season. As one example, Tikvah at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin pairs 10th graders with Tikvah campers for an entire summer. These chaverim spend time together, play games, take walks, and create long-term friendships that are fundamental to a camper's social development. One participant in the chaverim program said to me, "I originally thought that Tikvah was about working with people with different disabilities, but I realize that it is really just hanging out with people with different personalities."*

This idea is affirmed by a father of a Tikvah camper:

*Our son said to us after the first week at camp that he never realized that this is what life could be like. There were actually people talking to him, coming up to him to ask him to do activities. He was finally in an environment that accepted him... One of the main skills Mitch learned at camp was how to develop a friendship. He had never really developed a real friendship with anyone at home. At camp he had many friends.*

And by another parent:

*The Tikvah and Atzmayim [vocational] programs have been life changing for my daughter and therefore life changing for me. They have been wonderful in establishing her Jewish identity, increasing her independent level of functioning and mostly giving her a social group and a sense of belonging with peers which she was missing and probably still would be missing if it weren't for the Tikvah program.*

What happens at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin that can translate to a school setting?

Educating typical students on how to interact with special needs peers, by:

- Providing a framework for meaningful interaction.
- Allowing friendships to form and flourish.

The Machon (10th grade) and Tikvah campers get together twice a week for an hour as chaverim. This one-on-one time has produced amazing results. Although much thought goes into the pairing, both the Machon and Tikvah campers are initially very hesitant. Tikvah staff members support the Machon chaverim by meeting with them for an hour each week for "Machon enrichment," allowing them to ask questions about their Tikvah chaverim in a safe and nonjudgmental atmosphere as concerns come up. The chaverim hear things like "I want to be your girlfriend" and "Can I live in your cabin?" The Tikvah staff members provide suggestions on interacting with teens with

special needs and lead sessions including:

## **At the heart of the matter, it comes down to this: for the best camps, the success is in Jewish community building.**

- A discussion on the characteristics of atypical and special teens
- A look at Moshe as a great leader of the Jewish people who initially told G-d he was "slow of speech and not a man of many words" who asked "why should they (people of Israel) believe me?"
- Role playing ways to communicate appropriately with all people and not give mixed messages

While everything is done to provide a level of comfort, Machon campers are not required to work with Tikvah campers. One interesting observation about this partnership: it is not uncommon to have one or two Machon campers who don't always follow all the rules of camp or listen to their counselors. Yet when they interact with Tikvah peers, they display appropriate and respectful behavior.

Some feedback we've heard from Machon campers:

*I thought they (Tikvah campers) were really different but they are more like us than different.*

*I initially thought I would be helping my Tikvah chaverim the most. But I think I learned more than she did.*

*My experience with Tikvah made my summer.*

Our aim is to teach sensitivity, respect and that each person is created betzelem Elokim, in the image of G-d. We have also created an inclusive community where it is not acceptable for a typical camper to bully a camper from Tikvah. The typical campers tend to monitor each other so Tikvah kids are not pushed aside.

Outside of the chaverim program, tenth grade campers may elect to work in a less

intensive but still rewarding way with Tikvah campers during tefillot (morning services), swimming or sports. Tikvah and the tenth graders also partner to put on a lunch theater production. They write the script together and the tenth graders help campers in the Tikvah program learn their lines.

These two divisions also put on a musical together in Hebrew for the whole camp. Although most Tikvah campers are in the chorus, several Tikvah campers have sizable parts every summer. Finally, select Tikvah campers go with Machon on their five-day field trip.

Machon campers are not hindered by their interactions with campers from the Tikvah program. They enjoy their own full schedule of educational and recreational activities. The Tikvah campers who accompany Machon on their trip are chosen by their ability to fit in and not hold the group back. Tikvah campers who have lead roles in the Hebrew musical are prepared for their performance, and a Tikvah camper who is chosen to lead tefillot for Machon or for the entire camp will meet the same high standards

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 29]

## Interview with Lisa Breslau, Member of RAVSAK's Board of Directors

### *1) Tell us something about yourself.*

I'm a mother of 2 day school students. For them, school is really their second home, and perhaps my deep involvement in the school has something to do with that – we all spend so much time there, and thinking about it when we're not! Their growing and developing within the Jewish community has educated my husband and me as well, especially since we are not 'products' of day schools ourselves. I love puzzles, most kinds, but especially word games.



### *2) Why do you believe that Jewish day school education is important?*

Jewish day school education is about educating the "whole person." A day school influences the way that children evolve as people, and it provides the

kind of experiential learning that you only get from fulfilling mitzvot and generally incorporating Jewishness into your day to day life. I believe that to graduate from a Jewish day school is to take flight into the world with the confidence and knowledge of your citi-

zenship in the world and the responsibilities that that entails.

### *3) What strengths do you bring to the RAVSAK board?*

In joining the RAVSAK board, I bring a combination of day school leadership experience, business skills and entrepreneurial spirit. Having worked in the hi-tech sector during an exciting and powerful time, I feel a kinship with the pivotal moment of growth for RAVSAK as day school movement mentor and advocate.

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

Tikkun olam is one of my favorite Jewish teachings because it continually breaks us out of our daily personal concerns and reminds us to focus on all of humankind. ■

## The Community Model for Special Education Services

**[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21]**

The SLP and teacher meet regularly to work out solutions to classroom social issues and help Shoshana practice new strategies. Together they created a system for her assignments, breaking projects into smaller steps with check-in dates.

Ninth grader Ari decodes Hebrew and English well, but often without understanding what he reads. He finds following classroom discussions and math word problems difficult. His written language is also well below grade level and he has difficulty finding the right word to say. Ari's work with the SLP allows him to go sentence-by-sentence to understand the complex language and vocabulary in the texts and formulate a brief summary. The SLP meets weekly with the teacher to differentiate classroom instruction and assignments to enable Ari to access curriculum successfully. They focus on incorporating opportunities for explicit teaching of vocabulary, reading compre-

hension strategies and scaffolding written expression that will be helpful to all students, but essential for Ari. In addition, Ari continues to receive help with his assignments in the school learning center. All of his teachers meet monthly so that everyone reinforces the same learning strategies (i.e., activating prior knowledge, having a purpose for reading, note-taking and summarizing).

First grader David is not learning to read or write like the other students; he also balks at small motor tasks like coloring and cutting. Unable to focus on directions, he keeps jumping up from his seat. Nor can he stand in line without pushing the child in front of him. In partnership with David's teacher, the Gateways OT designs a "sensory diet," including such heavy-work calming strategies as carrying books to the library, wall push-ups and bringing in the recess equipment. By the end of a year working with his SLP, David is comfortable with the letter sounds and beginning

pre-reading skills. What's more, the entire class benefits, using the OT's strategies to get their minds and bodies ready to learn.

David reminds us that students who receive the right help early on progress more quickly and often need fewer or less intensive services later. Now David is in third grade, and his teacher is surprised to hear he once had so much difficulty in school. In fact, our greatest successes are when our students, now able to implement strategies and advocate for themselves, no longer need our help, and when teachers continue to incorporate strategies into their classrooms that are helpful to all students. The fruits of the collaboration between the agency and the schools—a generation of stronger and more resilient learners, a working team of professionals implementing creative strategies and a better, more welcoming school and community—lives on, creating a more welcoming and inclusive Jewish future. ■

# What Can Schools Learn from Summer Camps About Special Education?

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27]

as other campers.

A reflection on the Tikvah staff experience by Lilli Flink:

*Working as a counselor in the Tikvah program has been extremely rewarding and challenging for many reasons. For two months straight, I eat, sleep, and breathe special needs kids. My job tests my patience, but also makes me laugh harder than anything else. My campers struggle with behavioral*

*and social disorders that inhibit them on a day-to-day basis, on both the individual and interpersonal levels. At camp, the Tikvah staff works to create a supportive, warm environment for our campers to succeed, cultivate positive relationships, and work towards individualized goals. These kids are infinitely more than what they look like on paper or at first glance. They are extremely talented; some are geniuses, some trivia fiends, and others amazing artists and singers. As a part of the Tikvah program, my campers are not defined by what they cannot.*

*Being a Tikvah counselor has simultaneously tested my patience and forced me to reimagine the hidden and oft-overlooked potential of adolescents with special needs. By leaving my comfort zone to create a magically positive and influential atmosphere like the one at camp, I have seen Tikvah campers create friendships with typical adolescents that outlast the eight weeks of camp. It is truly a highlight to watch these bonds develop and enable our campers to take advantage of the opportunities that Ramah offers.* ■



## Student Profile: Alex Carciente, Project ROPE Participant

**M**y name is Alex Carciente. I am a junior at The Samuel Scheck Hillel Community Day School / The Ben Lipson Hillel Community High School in North Miami Beach. I was born in Caracas, Venezuela. My dad was the president of La Asociacion Israelita de Venezuela, which is the Jewish community of Venezuela. I moved to upstate New York at the age of nine, and two years ago I moved to Florida.

At the beginning of 10th grade, Hillel's assistant principal Joshua Meisels offered me the opportunity to join Project ROPE. The program has taught me valuable skills that have helped me evolve into a more sophisticated individual. This year, Mr. Meisels offered me the opportunity of serving as ROPE's student lead. I was honored. I truly feel the work that we as a team do in ROPE really does help, not only those for whom

we fundraise, but also ourselves as we become better people and better Jews.

This year's ROPE team comprises ten talented high school students who work tirelessly throughout the year. We are not an after-school club or a class; we meet during lunch time as often as necessary. So far we have visited two organizations as part of our research to understand who it is that we are really helping. For fundraising, we have added tzedakah boxes to all of our high school minyanim. We make use of our school's theater productions to collect funds,

and we are in the process of creating a video that we will show in all classes to make the student body more aware of what we do. Last year we produced a video that raised 400 dollars in just two days. The video pairs a series of touching photos with inspirational quotes. It helps people understand that there are people in dire need of aid, and that we have the ability to help them.

This year's Project ROPE topic is poverty, and within our group we have decided to focus on organizations that "help people help themselves."

In these rough economic times, we feel it is important to help those who have lost their jobs – now unable to support their families – develop valuable skills that will empower them to rebuild their lives. As students of Hillel, we are very proud of what we accomplish with ROPE. We acquire skills and learn values that we will keep for a lifetime. ■



Alex Carciente (back row, left) and the Hillel Project ROPE team

# Enemies a Love Story: The Family's Perspective

■ by DAVID KALB

**A**NY families confide in me, as a rabbi, about their issues and challenges. One of the greatest problems families have shared with me in recent years has been that of special needs children and Jewish day schools. Families have told me about being turned away from Jewish day schools, being “counseled out” of Jewish day schools, being welcomed into Jewish day schools with inadequate special education programs and living in communities where they simply could not find a Jewish day school that had any kind of special education program.

I am dismayed when it comes to the complacency of the Jewish community in terms of working with children with special needs. With all of the concerns our community has about assimilation, how can we turn Jewish children away from a Jewish day school simply because they have special needs? Also, how can Jewish day schools take children they are not in any way capable of dealing with? What is the answer? How do we solve this problem?

## PROFESSIONALISM

Jewish day schools need trained professionals in special education to create and run special education programs. Nothing short of this should be accepted. Too many Jewish day schools are unable to work with children with special needs and turn them away. Everyone in the Jewish community needs to do something about this problem. I have encountered Jewish day schools that are large and well-funded and yet have special education departments led by people without special education degrees. In at least one case there is an administrator of a special education program in a Jewish day school without any education degree.

## FUNDING

Special education, especially in a Jewish day school setting, is expensive. Class size obviously has to be smaller. Teachers need more advanced degrees and training. Therapists, psychologists, and other specialists all need to be part of the full time faculty of any substantive special education program. The fact that we are talking about private schools and not public schools makes the burden of funding these programs huge. Some local public school boards may give some funding to children with special needs, even when they are attending Jewish day schools. However, this is only part of the solution. Many Jewish day schools are already over-burdened economically. Perhaps a solution is for the greater Jewish community to help fund special education programs in Jewish day schools. Jewish foundations need to make this a priority.



## INCLUSIVITY

The Jewish community needs to be more inclusive of children with special needs. While this can partly be accomplished through creating appropriate special education programs in the context of Jewish day schools, this alone is not enough.

**Rabbi David Kalb** is Director of Jewish Education at the Bronfman Center for Jewish Life at the 92nd Street Y in New York City. He can be reached at [DKalb@92y.org](mailto:DKalb@92y.org).

Jewish day schools as a whole need to create a culture of inclusion. This is not just important for the children and parents who are dealing with these issues but it is also important for children, parents, teachers and administrators enrolled and associated with mainstream educational settings. They need to be sensitized to respect different types of learners.

## ELIMINATE STIGMA

Arguably one of the biggest problems in dealing with special needs is the issue of stigma. Parents often hide their children’s issues to prevent them from being stigmatized. These parents are doing a great disservice to their children by preventing them from getting the help they need.

Some of these parents find help for their children privately and quietly outside of the school setting. In some cases they are truly able to help their children. However, more often than not, this method does not work. People who hide their children’s issues from their school are obviously not able to communicate and coordinate with the school. So with all the help these children are getting outside of school, they

are still at a disadvantage in the classroom.

Furthermore, parents who hide their children's issues from the school are probably hiding them from friends as well. As a result, they are isolated and their children are isolated. This isolation prevents them from learning from other parents who are facing similar challenges. Jewish day schools exacerbate the issue of stigma by creating a non-inclusive atmosphere for children with special needs. However, what is even worse is when day schools know the children in their care have issues, but the parents are unaware and the day schools do not bring it to the parents' attention because of the issue of stigma.

Stigma also prevents the creation of special education programs in Jewish day schools. One of the reasons you hear for why many day schools are reluctant to start a special education program is they feel the numbers do not justify it. Perhaps the reason the numbers do not justify it is that so many parents with children with special needs in the Jewish community are hiding their children's issues. If these parents would come forward, it might become clear that the numbers often do justify the creation of such programs.

There are some Jewish day schools that are dealing well with children with special needs. Such schools truly understand children with special needs. They have special education programs that encompass general and Jewish studies. These programs are staffed by trained professionals including all of the necessary specialists, a director, special education teachers, occupational therapists, speech therapists, reading specialists and a psychologist. Every student is considered as an individual learner. These programs try to make sure that all students get what they need to optimize their learning experience. To accomplish this, students who are in such programs for certain subjects may be in the mainstream program for other subjects. It is even conceivable that a child can be in the special education program and the gifted program at the same time.

However, it is not just that these types of

special education programs are high quality. As a whole, schools that have such programs make a major effort to be inclusive. They try to create an environment where children are taught inclusivity and the importance of respecting different types of learners. Such schools are inclusive to children's learning, physical, medical, psychological and emotional issues. I do not believe this is a coincidence. You will also find that schools that are inclusive to these types of issues are also inclusive to diversity in terms of the way families approach Judaism. Usually such schools will attract families from many different types of Jewish backgrounds, Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, Orthodox, post-

the rear? Why did they leave them open to attack? Why did they not position them in a place where they could be protected?

The commentary *Itturei Torah* says:

If the community of Israel had not **forgotten** these stragglers, but rather, had brought them close under the wings of G-d's Presence in order to return them underneath the clouds of glory, that they would be together with all the house of Israel, then Amalek would not have overcome them and beaten them. But because these stragglers were **left behind**, that is, you let them be **left behind** and you **forgot them...** this is the **forgetting**. The

**I am dismayed when it comes to the complacency of the Jewish community in terms of working with children with special needs. With all of the concerns our community has about assimilation, how can we turn Jewish children away from a Jewish day school simply because they have special needs?**

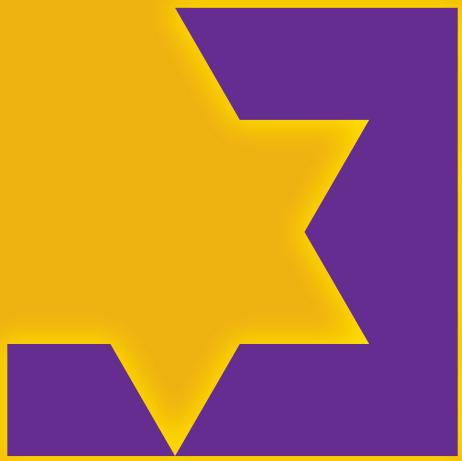
denominational, trans-denominational, non-denominational and unaffiliated. The faculties in such schools are also diverse. In these types of schools, whichever approach a given family has to Judaism, it will be respected. The children are also taught to respect different approaches to Judaism. When you are a truly inclusive school you are inclusive to any issue. Inclusivity cannot be determined on a case by case basis; it needs to be systemic. One such school is Carmel Academy (formerly Westchester Fairfield) in Greenwich, Connecticut.

On the Shabbat before Purim, Shabbat Zachor (the Shabbat of Remembrance), we read Deuteronomy 25:17-19, which tells the story of Amalek, a group that attacked the Jewish people when they were traveling from Egypt to Israel. Amalek is considered the definition of evil because they attacked the Jewish people from behind, focusing on the people who were in the back of the line. Who was in the back of the line? The weak, the sick and the physically challenged. Why did the Israelites leave the weakest individuals in

people of Israel were "weary, tired and not G-d-fearing" and **forgot** these brothers and sisters so Amalek was able to cut them off. Therefore, the Torah commands us to **remember** Amalek. And with this, warned us never again to **forget** our brothers and sisters in need of support and help, keeping them within the camp. **Never Forget.**

This understanding of the text forces us to think about what our responsibilities are towards the weakest among us. We must realize that we, as individuals and as a society, often leave the weakest behind. There are also times that it is not the weakest that we leave behind; sometimes we leave behind people who are just experiencing challenges.

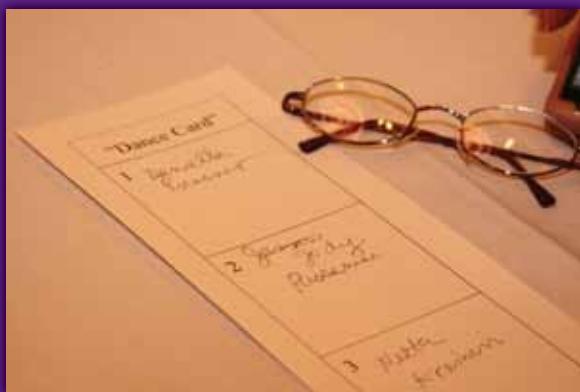
When a Jewish day school does not provide appropriate services for children with special needs they are leaving them at the back of the line. Let's stop leaving children with special needs at the back the line. Let's bring them up front where they can learn and enjoy the beauty of Judaism like every other child.



# North American Jewish Day School Conference

## The High of the (V)

A record turnout of more than 500 education leaders participated in the North American Jewish Day School Conference in Los Angeles. For the second straight year, the conference underscored the power of collaboration among the Jewish community's day schools. Schechter Day School of Los Angeles and the Institute for University-Based Jewish Education and Leadership were the hosts.



# In Performance, High-Tech Jewish Day School (Very Near) Future

more than 600 educational professionals in this year's North American Jewish Day School Conference in Los Angeles. For the second consecutive year, the conference showcased the collaborative nature of the day school movement, as the Solomon Schechter Day School Association, the North American Jewish Day School Partnership, and PARDeS:

The Progressive Association of Reform Day Schools joined forces with RAVSAK to organize the conference and explore common themes. From making special education a priority within the Jewish day school framework, to harnessing technology to enhance and strengthen curricula and classrooms, to maintaining financially sustainable institutions of quality, the conference addressed issues relevant to a day school movement committed to transmitting knowledge, enhancing practice, and solidifying its place on the educational landscape. This year's theme underscored how Jewish educational professionals are transforming their individual institutions—and the day school

movement itself—into inclusive venues of educational quality and value utilizing proven, effective and emerging approaches. The conference, featuring four keynote speakers and nearly 70 sessions, brought out the collegiality of educators learning together in dedication to a shared vision of a strong, vibrant Jewish future. ■



# Bound to Succeed: Building Parent-Professional Collaboration

■ by SHELLY CHRISTENSEN

**T**HE “Mrs. Christensen” calls usually started like this: *“Mrs. Christensen, this is Jacob’s religious school teacher and I wanted to talk to you about his behavior...lack of attention...homework situation.”*

Receiving these calls on a regular basis from religious and public school teachers was predictable. The calls were never about something positive. They almost always focused on his classroom behavior. Jacob was never out of control. In fact, he used to read quietly during the first five minutes of class. Teachers always commented on this behavior. It just wasn’t acceptable. And as always, I would talk with Jacob about this and beg him not to read during class. Nonetheless, I always felt responsible for his behavior.

When Jacob was eight, he was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The diagnosis changed when the DSM-IV included Asperger syndrome, a cousin of autism which causes sensory and social skills difficulties.

As parents we may acknowledge that having a disability isn’t fair. We grieve the child we hoped we’d raise, and somewhere within our behavior reflects the loss of control of our child’s life. Some parents lash out at professionals; others are passive; some seek answers wherever they can find them.

One Mrs. Christensen call was my epiphany. The middle school assistant principal called to tell me that they were going to punish Jacob for poking a hole in a concrete wall with a pencil. The school wanted to send Jacob to the bus garage in a taxi to clean buses with a toothbrush. (The absurdity of this still astounds me!)

I unleashed a barrage of angry words and insults, questioning how this punishment was going to provide Jacob with a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, an entitlement under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the law of the land for special education.

When I stopped yelling and hung up the phone, my office colleagues stood and applauded.

I felt no pride. I realized that my job as Jake’s parent was to work with school staff to understand how his disability impacted his educational life and to collaborate with them to achieve positive outcomes. Clearly, getting angry was not going to help Jacob succeed in school.

I turned my attention to learning what drives parents of children with disabilities to become so angry and frustrated. I wanted to understand my behavior. I discovered that many parents react in similar ways when they raise a child with special needs. Parents have their own needs on this journey. Once I understood my needs, the Mrs. Christensen calls stopped.

When a child is diagnosed with a disability, parents are thrust into a reality that is unexpected and uncertain. Dreams of a bar or bat mitzvah, college and standing



**Shelly Christensen** is Program Manager of the Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities at Jewish Family and Children’s Service of Minneapolis, Minnesota. She can be reached at [schristensen@jfcsmpls.org](mailto:schristensen@jfcsmpls.org).

under the chuppah one day play significantly into hopes and dreams for a child.

When a child does not fit that plan, parents experience the loss of those dreams. The sense of isolation, sadness, and uncertainty can be devastating. Many parents feel that control over the child’s life has been shifted to doctors, special educators and social workers, creating feelings of powerlessness.

The impact of professional partnership with parents on this journey is significant. The cornerstone of support you can provide is based on two things: understanding the needs that parents have when a child is diagnosed with a disability, and building a trusting relationship with them.

Ask parents to tell you their story. Building a strong trusting relationship is ultimately based on effective communication. Simply asking a parent about his or her child is very important. Your interest shows parents that you know there is more to the child than the disability and that you care. Understand the issues that many parents face. Those include:

**Loss of dreams.** Parents experience myriad emotions when a child is diagnosed. These emotions return at various transitions in the child’s life. Feelings of guilt,

denial, anger and fear often keep a parent stuck on an emotional roller coaster. When we are stuck, we lash out at anyone who we can blame whether it is realistic or not. The loss of dreams, the loss of control and the uncertainty of the future underlie negative or difficult behavior. When parents ultimately understand that they can create new dreams based on the reality of their child, these feelings subside.

*Immediate concerns.* When Jacob was first diagnosed I worried about what I had done during my pregnancy that caused ADHD. We know now that genetic factors play an enormous role. After he was diagnosed I was unsure what I was supposed to do next. My roadmap was planned for a neurotypical Jacob, not a boy with a disability. I did not know where to turn even with a great sense of urgency to do something. We have not yet become experts in navigating the systems for special education, medical and insurance needs. We don't even know what we don't even know!

*Parents' Four Needs.* While parents are consumed with caring for their child with a disability and their siblings, their own needs may go unrecognized. Identifying the need for information, social support, emotional support and making meaning are the very things that help parents navigate their journey with success. When parents recognize that caring for their own needs throughout the parenting years is vital, they begin to emerge from the unknown and learn to adapt to their new role.

1. **Information.** Parents must learn about the diagnosis and what that may mean for their child. They must learn about the disability, educational options, medical and therapeutic choices and services that are available to their child. Parents can become familiar with government services and special education law. There are an overwhelming number of resources that can provide information. Sometimes, it is helpful for a parent to speak to another parent whose child has a similar disability and can relay information from their own experiences.



2. **Social.** Following a diagnosis, the sense of isolation can be enormous. Parents must find ways to connect to others with whom they can trust to share their fears and anxieties. Extended family members, traditionally a source of support, may not be nearby to provide comfort, or they may be experiencing their own grief. Friends who have children with typical development may not understand. Just the very presence of those friends may be too painful for a parent of a newly diagnosed child. The overwhelming sense of responsibility to care for the child does not leave much time or energy to connect with the outside world. Sharing with another parent who has similar experiences can help.
3. **Emotional.** Many emotions manifest in behaviors such as anger, isolation, sadness and hopelessness. Parents inevitably bargain with a higher power to fix the disability. When that bargaining goes unnoticed, when emotions overwhelm, parents may feel cloaked in depression. If the emotions impair daily functioning, parents should seek professional help to learn to manage their emotions. This kind of support can help them sort out their own feelings and begin to feel hopeful for their child.
4. **Making Meaning.** As parents seek to find ways to deal with this unplanned journey, they will often ask "why me, why my child?" When that question

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 36]

**[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35]**

goes unanswered, many parents begin to change the nature of their thinking. Instead of looking outside of themselves for answers, they begin to reflect on what their role can be as parent of a child with a disability. Making meaning of the journey does not mean that one knows why this has happened. It means that parents can take each day as it comes, knowing that others have been down the same road. Parents begin to adapt to their role as “parent of a child with a disability.”

**Parents' new hopes and dreams.** Raising a child with a disability is part of the fabric that makes families unique. The hopefulness that became buried under the fallout from the diagnosis reemerges based on the knowledge that whatever lies ahead, parents have the confidence to move forward, often taking one step at a time.

**Parents need trusted partners in order for collaboration to exist.** Trusted professionals have qualities such as empathy, commitment, and the ability to listen. They let parents know that they care about the child and are willing and able to collaborate with them. Together, parents

and professionals form a team that works together. The team focus should be on the child.

Parents are the constant in a child's life after the school year ends. They provide information about the child and share their hopes and dreams. They are your equal partners in the collaborative effort to provide a meaningful and successful education for the student.

Begin the journey together by asking parents what their preference is for communicating with you. By agreeing how to communicate, everyone understands that communication is a critical part of the relationship. Agreeing on the “how” of communication ensures that there will be an ongoing dialogue of people who care about the student.

*You don't have to “fix” the child or the situation.* Many caring professionals wanted to “fix” Jacob. The only problem with this thinking is that there was nothing to fix! This thinking creates conflict and diminishes the effectiveness of the collaboration. Parents and professionals must agree that the child needs supports and assistance to level the playing field to be successful. They must also agree that everyone on this

collaborative team has a role to play.

Celebrate the successes together. Each team has the opportunity to celebrate each little step along the way. Once Jacob's team was established, we communicated regularly. Each communication started out with a successful step. We had built a powerful team that supported Jacob's success in school.

Jacob never did have to clean buses with a toothbrush. He graduated from religious school in tenth grade and at the age of 25 is fulfilling his dream of attending the University of Minnesota. Jacob recently participated in a Taglit-Birthright program for young adults with Asperger syndrome and spent ten days in Israel. He is living life on his terms with the support of his family and people who care about him.

And me? I'm no longer angry. I'm proud of how I have evolved so that I became aware of my own needs. I worked hard to understand them and meet them. There is no feeling more rewarding than seeing your child become as an independent adult who has his own hopes and dreams to realize. I will always feel gratitude for the many caring professionals on our journey. ■

## Raising Awareness, Changing Attitudes: The Time Is Now

**[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19]**

tion plans whereby one school's goal is to serve children with autism and communication disorders, another's is to serve children with moderate to severe learning disabilities, and so on. Parents of children with special needs are usually willing to cross denominational lines if it means their child will be included in Jewish education.

4. Utilize Jewish special needs resources such as Matan, Gateways, Hidden Sparks or your local central agency to help determine what steps should be included in your action plan. How many new staff members would you need? How many children could you accept? How do you plan for successful integration into your school? Don't rein-

vent the wheel. There are inclusive Jewish day schools (such as Carmel Academy and the Sinai Schools) that would be happy to share their methodologies, how they took their first steps and how they maintain success.

5. Invite your entire parent body to be part of the discussion. Parents of typically developing children who believe in the power of inclusion can be the best advocates for welcoming children with special needs into the school. Organizations and schools such as those mentioned above, as well as parents in your school who work in education or related fields, can help answer questions from parents who are new to the idea of inclusion.

In parashat Shemot, G-d charges Moshe

with leading the Jewish people out of Egypt. In turn, Moshe responds (loosely translated!), “G-d, I don't know if you've noticed, but I don't speak so well. I have a stutter, and being a public figure might not be the right job for me.” G-d tells Moshe, “Yes, I am aware of that because I created you this way. In you, I see all of your abilities, not simply the things you struggle with.” G-d recognized Moshe's unique abilities and did not define him by his disability, and that is how the Jewish people came to view him as well.

With the proper support, determination and belief, individuals with special needs will surpass your expectations. Could Josh have been the next great Jewish leader? What Jewish institution is going to say yes so that he—and all those who come after him—won't be lost to us? ■

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# Partnering with Parents to Turn Vision into Reality

■ by MARIASHI GRONER

**H**EVERY Jewish child deserves a Jewish education." "No child will be turned away for financial reasons." "Of course, the Jewish community believes in Jewish education."

Do you sometimes feel like you're speaking out of two sides of your mouth? I do. I felt like that during last two years when we were unable to accept every Jewish child because we did not have the funds available to support families who could not pay full tuition.

I have also felt like that many times over the past twenty years, when we had to counsel out many Jewish children who had learning disabilities that demanded support, guidance and repetition we just could not provide in a classroom typically moving at an academically accelerated pace. As the education professionals that we are, we sat with the parents, with compassionate faces and words, and explained that we could not teach their children in the way they needed to be taught. We were a school that was competing with the best of the best. Our curriculum was providing an education experience for our students that was sometimes one or two grade levels above typical expectations. We could not support children in the classroom who were lagging six months to two years behind. What were we to do with them? This was beyond differentiated instruction. This demanded extra teachers, resources and funds that we just did not have.

As a result, these Jewish children went on to public schools where (at least in North Carolina) they really didn't get that much support, but they weren't as challenged because the classrooms weren't that advanced, or they went to private schools that were specially set up for these children and where they paid \$7,000 above our school's tuition so that the children could get all the extra added support that they needed.

Jewish children who belonged in a Jewish school were going elsewhere because they couldn't learn the way we decided they needed to learn. Shame on us!

The transformation in my, and my school's, thinking started from personal experience. When my son was ready for kindergarten, I took him for his IQ

screening that our school requires for admissions. I had the school psychologist do a more extensive evaluation, since I knew that he had more challenges than the typical child. After the psychologist finished the assessment, he turned to my husband and me and said, "I don't believe CJDS is the right school for your son. You might want to look at some other options." Keeping in mind that there are no other Jewish schools in the city, I responded, "That's not happening. Tell me what I need to

do to make it possible for him to attend CJDS."

I knew I could not expect the school to provide the support, therapy, tutoring, and shadowing that he might need. I would have to find the resources for that, but I would be providing all of it in the Jewish environment and atmosphere that I value over everything else. And so we



**Mariashi Groner** is Director of the Charlotte Jewish Day School. She can be reached at [mgroner@cjdschool.org](mailto:mgroner@cjdschool.org).

did, and he successfully graduated CJDS fifth grade with standardized scores in the 80th percentile across the board. Was it costly? Yes. Would I have paid it at some other specialized school? Yes. But he would have missed out on what I consider most precious—his Judaism.

I learned my own personal lesson and took it to other parents who together with me valued what CJDS offers their children, whether it is the Judaism that they are fortunate enough to realize is

**“Our curriculum was providing an education experience for our students that was sometimes one or two grade levels above typical expectations. We could not support children in the classroom who were lagging six months to two years behind.**

so important, or the nurturing environment that they know exists nowhere else like our school, or the class size and teacher-student ratio that they cannot find in other schools. Since then I have often (not always) been able to impress

on some parents that we can make it happen if they will partner with us—and that is the most important part of this plan—to provide a Jewish day school education for children who can't

**These children are now moving on in their lives and know their way around the synagogue, can read and speak Hebrew, and know who they are and where they come from. Why should they get lost?**

necessarily keep up with an academically accelerated curriculum.

At times, we have students who are given special instruction in math or reading

in a separate classroom because they are unable to manage a typical math class or reading curriculum. Other times, there are students who need shadowing only at recess, but academically are stars of the

the regular tutoring agencies.

This intervention has been successful many times, and I watch children graduate from our school when many people would have said it could never have happened. These children are now moving on in their lives and know their way around the synagogue, can read and speak Hebrew, and know who they are and where they come from. Many times these are the children with the extra passion for Judaism. Why should they get lost? We owe them no less than what we provide for every other child who attends our school and was born with an IQ with a few numbers higher than theirs or with a few DSM numbers added to their psychology evaluation. Truly, let's leave no child behind. ■

## Funding Special Education: New Opportunities

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16]

typically too expensive to provide in a small day school program but would be very beneficial and more affordable when agencies collaborate and share resources. A larger pool of investors would have better ability to overhaul the continuum of services currently provided and creating a vision to work toward for the future.

Although funding special needs programs, especially in Jewish day schools, appears daunting to many, there are communities that have made tremendous strides in the past decade. Many of the programs began in individual cities but today collaborate through listservs, share best practices and attend conferences together. We must continue to collaborate on all fronts, sharing ideas, funding options and service providers. It is only through working together that we can reach the goal of educating all children Jewishly, regardless of their abilities. Ultimately, not only is this the right thing to do, but it will also enrich the whole Jewish community. ■

The Jaffa Institute's 'Youth 4 Youth' Program enables American school children to engage with impoverished Israeli youth.

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For more information contact: Jackie Frankel, Youth 4 Youth Coordinator at [Jackie@jaffainst.co.il](mailto:Jackie@jaffainst.co.il) or on +972-3-683-2626.

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# Special Education in

**I**t's one thing to listen to the experts and thought leaders in the field of special education; it's another thing altogether to talk to leaders in the day school field. The gap between vision and reality regarding inclusion of children with special needs can appear quite stark. For those leaders who truly take this issue to heart, the obstacles to successful implementation may at times seem insurmountable. Fortunately, there are models of excellence, many of which appear throughout this issue. Below are reports from four schools sharing the fruit of their experience in this holy work.

## PALS: Alternative Learning Strategies

■ CARMEL ACADEMY, GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT

The PALS philosophy is predicated upon the belief that it is the methodology not the curriculum that drives the program. As professionals, we fully understand that without an investment on the part of the student, our efforts are for naught. Unless the child has a stake in the learning process, the quality of performance and the availability for instruction is severely compromised. In order to claim ownership, to master any given skill, the proper scaffolding must be custom designed.

Our program is three-pronged: interactive, interdisciplinary and integrated. Ours is a hands-on multi-sensory/experiential approach to the curriculum. "Interdisciplinary" denotes the use of a central theme crossing all major subject areas (math, reading, language arts, social studies, science). Lastly, but of equal importance, is the integration of both the secular and the Judaic. Our children all benefit from the Jewish experience. The scope and depth of this exposure is determined on an individual basis; however, we provide all students with myriad opportunities afforded to them in a Jewish day school setting.

The children best able to benefit from all we have to offer are designated as those with language-based learning disabilities. This diagnosis of necessity must be substantiated by the proper documentation. The high probability of social and/or behavioral overlays is clearly understood. However, these issues must be secondary to the primary learning disability.

Sharing the prevailing educational philosophy at Carmel, we too deliberately control our student/teacher ratio. Our PALS classes are capped at ten and taught by two master's level professionals. A full support staff is available on an as needed basis. This includes the services of an occupational therapist with a specialty in sensory integration; a speech/language therapist; a school psychologist who is available to counsel parents, consult with staff and facilitate social skills between and among the students; and an Orton/Gillingham reading specialist.

The special education division at Carmel offers a unique, dynamic, all-inclusive educational experience in an integrated setting to all those committed to the Jewish experience. It affords parents the oppor-

tunity to educate all the children in the family in just one school. It provides an individualized educational plan for each student predicated on learning styles and documented needs. It enhances the best in every Jewish child. We cannot make children more than who they are, but we would be remiss if we settled for less. ■



# Our Schools

## Ein Gedi: An Oasis of Support

■ CHARLOTTE JEWISH DAY SCHOOL, CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Ein Gedi, the lush oasis that springs up in the desert near the Dead Sea, brings one a sense of peace, calm and wonder at G-d's miraculous ability to bring goodness in the face of difficulty. The Ein Gedi classroom at the Charlotte Jewish Day School mirrors this oasis in Israel. It is a classroom for students who face challenges in this hurried, overwhelming and sometimes insensitive world. When children with various emotional, behavioral or social challenges try to make their way through a class of twenty children and find it to be too much, they know that the safe haven of Ein Gedi awaits them.

We were faced with a mission of educating all Jewish children, but were stumped by our inability to meet the needs of students with diagnoses of autism, Asperger's, bipolar disorder and similar conditions. In addition, we found that they often caused disruptions for other children in a regular classroom setting. For these reasons, we created a self-contained classroom with a student/teacher ratio of one to three, a ratio that ensures an in-

dividualized academic program, guidance in social and life skills and support of the emotional domain.

What is most wonderful about this practice is that because this class is set up within our day school, the opportunities to mainstream are many. When a

Jewish educators, we can't allow that.

There is no question that financial support for a program such as this is a necessity. We were fortunate that the parents of the first children to attend this program wanted it so badly that they raised close to \$100,000 for the first year. The fun-



child proves ready, he or she is able to participate in the regular class activities. Moreover, the "typical" children in our mainstream classes have embraced these children as one of their own, their family. What better lesson of love and unity can we teach, if not this?

The joy on the children's faces as they find this oasis where they are respected, honored and treasured is what makes this class so special. This is besides the indisputable fact that a Jewish child, regardless of the physical or emotional challenges he or she faces, belongs in a Jewish environment where the holidays, blessings and prayers are heard and felt by all children, even those who won't or can't necessarily perform these practices. Oftentimes these children find themselves in programs of other religious denominations, inadvertently experiencing practices from other faiths. As

draising continued at a rate of \$25,000 for five more years and is now at a comfortable \$15,000 a year. We know that financial backing is very important since the ratio is so low. The teacher has to be highly trained in behavioral management in addition to special education; we have found that a special education degree on its own is not sufficient for a class like this.

In Charlotte we are finally taking care of all of our Jewish children. We are proving that our love for and responsibility to them is not dependent on their behavior or progress. We are carrying out the eternal mission of a Jewish community, to serve all Jewish children—not just the children who have the perfect IQ with all of their abilities intact.

We love them for who they are and for the special neshamah that they have. ■



# Special Education in Shorashim Program—Learning to Learn

■ VANCOUVER TALMUD TORAH, VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Shorashim, a special needs program for formally identified students who have difficulty processing Hebrew in dual-language classes, is being piloted this year at Vancouver Talmud Torah. Nine students currently participate in a Grade 4/5 split class. Sessions of eighty minutes are held daily, empowering learners to develop Judaic knowledge and skills suitable to individual needs, abilities and interests.

Developing the Shorashim curriculum, as well as teaching it, is master teacher Myra Michaelson, Judaic studies learning specialist and alumna of Project SuLaM. Students work with a variety of web-based education tools, multimedia and other resources including Voki, Interactive comics, Blabberize, imovies, Animoto, Jeopardylabs and many more, in addition to a Shorashim Wiki.

Myra states, "It feels like I am speeding down the tech highway. I am awestruck by the number of new sites and web tools available for educators and for students."

Judaic subjects equivalent to each grade level are taught solely in English. Students study Torah, Navi, the Jewish holiday cycle, Israel, history, the Holocaust, Jewish values as well as major TaLaM themes. Those able to cope with continuing the development of their Hebrew decoding and fluency skills work on a computer-based program.

The teacher's role of helper, guide and facilitator increases learning efficiency, reduces student anxiety and produces meaningful learning.

Throughout the program, student's gen-

eral studies English language skills for reading, comprehension, note taking and writing are reinforced simultaneously with Judaic learning.

Students in the Shorashim program do not attend their regular Judaic studies class. Their daily schedule ensures that they accompany peers for specialty subjects such as art, drama, gym, music, as well as any special programs.

In this exciting time for Jewish education, with so many options available for helping all of our students to succeed and so many ways to reach students with different learning styles, the technology-based Shorashim program allows a perfect fit for the students attending and makes Judaic learning upbeat and meaningful while utilizing essential skills for the 21st century. ■



# Our Schools

## The Small School Support Primer

■ N. E. MILES JEWISH DAY SCHOOL, BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

How does a small Jewish day school with limited staff and a fairly open admissions policy provide for student support services? How can the increased need of special students be met when financial resources are thin? What follows are a few suggestions based on our experience at the N.E. Miles Jewish Day School, a school with under 100 students.

**Gain Buy-in, Share Research:** First make certain that the stakeholders in the community are invested in the inclusion of a special needs component. There is discomfort among some that these children will have a negative impact upon the academic standards of the school. Be sure to share the research with those community members and be very clear about the importance of inclusion in fulfilling the school's mission. There will be skeptics among both teachers and other stakeholders. Don't expect to change any minds, but form alliances with those who support what you are doing.

**Build Expertise and Resources:** Another important step in developing a program is the use of a professional consultant. Funding learning specialists in a small school of 100-200 students is challenging. Moreover, even if you have a highly qualified professional at the school, often they are not viewed as an "expert," so call in an outsider. Parents and teachers respond best when outside consultants provide psychological diagnostics and recommendations. Look for a school in your region with a similar mission and population, with a well-established and reputable student support program. This consultant is likely to be less expensive and more likely to give you truly helpful suggestions that will be easily digested by the staff. Once you have a written report you may choose those parts of the plan that seem most relevant to student needs and school program.

**Key Ingredient—Professional Development:** In order to ensure the school's

program is cohesive in addressing student support, teachers need common tools and common language to implement an inclusionary model. Workshops / in-services on a variety of topics (differentiated instruction, behavior management, ADHD, Asperger's, etc.) create the common approach. This encourages the teachers to feel they have the tools to deal with a varied population. It is also important to realize some teachers, despite your best efforts, will struggle to change the way they teach, and they will not want students with special needs in their classrooms. However, it is a simple reality that must be acknowledged in any population. Protecting the teachers from special needs students is no solution.

**Student Support as a Priority:** When possible, staffing should include teachers with special education experience that can provide pull-out service when necessary. The creation

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 45]



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# Inclusion Done Right— From the Top Down

■ by **ABBIE WEISBERG** and **HEATHER TRATT**

**R**ESEARCH shows that inclusion continues to be best practice in the field of special education. In the words of disability researcher Zana Marie Lutfiyya: “If people with cognitive impairments are to form friendships and be a part of society as adults, these relationships must develop during childhood. Classmates and neighbors will grow into adult coworkers and friends later in life. Integrated classrooms and recreational activities are important, but are only successful when facilitated. In these settings children with and without disabilities get to meet each other and form relationships.”

Inclusion works from the top down; it starts with open lines of communication between administrations of the two partnering agencies. The same philosophy applies whether facilitating inclusion in an educational, recreational, or vocational setting. Common questions asked include, Who is the “go to” person if there are issues? Who covers the liability if someone gets hurt? Both questions need to be addressed prior to the start of the program.

Unfortunately, special needs students and staff are often considered “guests” in the host site program. A genuine partnership based on mutual respect must be established between the parties, as successful inclusion requires buy-in and cooperation from everyone. The host site administration should include support staff provided by the special needs partnering agency and welcome them as part of their team. Establishing clear lines of communication and expectations going in is essential to achieving the desired outcome. As for liability concerns, experience has led us to believe it’s best when the special needs organization carries its own insurance and the host site(s) are added as an additional insured party.

Another critical component of successful inclusion is the preparation and education of the typically developing students, staff, or employers. This involves disability awareness—or, as we call it, ability awareness training. During these orientation sessions, lessons taught must relay the how-tos of communicating with students with special needs. These lessons are conveyed through stories, games, articles and dialogue, all dependent on the age of the peer group. By utilizing this pre-introduction format to establish a level of comfort for engagement, we’ve found that the typical students feel privileged and eager to have this opportunity. When the children actually get to know each other as individuals, true caring and friendships emerge.

It is also important to note that integration cannot be forced. Inclusion must be

individualized to the best of each child’s ability. Some individuals need assistance with fitting into certain settings and activities. Others may need someone to facilitate their involvement or to interpret for them. An individualized, one-on-one approach is the key to success and far-reaching, long-term impact.

The best practice is to train the staff of students with intellectual delays uniformly across all programs. At Keshet, we adhere to a philosophy of structured teaching, designed to give the individual with intellectual disabilities clear expectations



**Abbie Weisberg** is CEO/Executive Director and **Heather Tratt** is COO of Keshet, an organization based in Northbrook, Illinois, that has successfully integrated more than 2,000 children and adults with developmental disabilities into educational, recreational, and vocational settings. They can be reached at [abbie@keshet.org](mailto:abbie@keshet.org) and [Heather@Keshet.org](mailto:Heather@Keshet.org).

and as much visual support as possible. This could be in the form of a written schedule (either in picture or words) or a defined workspace, and empowers the individual to act as independently as possible. Guidance from staff may include such phrases as “check your schedule” or “your turn” when playing a game, which offers respect and dignity to the individual. This allows the staff to model appropriate techniques for working with the student with special needs. By the staff serving as a model for the typically developing peers, they in turn are better able to communicate and understand how to connect with the child with special needs.

From a young age people recognize differences in each other. Children might recognize the additional staff support, but if done properly, that staff will become the connector fostering a positive relationship. All participants find mutual ways of communicating and sharing in

each other's lives, and learn to focus on capabilities instead of perceived inabilities. For typical students, these early and meaningful relationships with individuals with disabilities can shape their attitudes and values and empower them to assist and advocate for those in need, as adults.

Inclusion done right produces children who have grown up "disability blind," accepting each other as equals regardless of their abilities. Relationships turn into lifelong friendships. One such example is that of Jeremy and Justin. Today, Jeremy and Justin are young adults—Jeremy is a college student. Justin and Jeremy met 13 years ago when they both attended Solomon Schechter Day School and spent their summers at a local JCC day camp, where Keshet integrates over 160 children with cognitive impairments on an annual basis. On a hot day, the phone rang at Justin's home and his mom answered. For the first time, the call was for Justin (six years old at the time). "May I speak to Justin?" Justin's mom replied, "Justin does not speak." Jeremy responded, "I know." With baited breath, Justin's mom listened carefully and heard Jeremy tell Justin, "Don't forget to wear your camp T-shirt tomorrow, it's picture day!" Today, Jeremy still calls Justin on a regular basis and their conversations largely revolve around events of the day and childhood memories of their time together.

Leslie Soodak and Elizabeth Erwin summarize the ways that our understanding of special education has changed in recent years. "For a long time, children with disabilities were educated in separate classes or in separate schools. People got used to the idea that *special* education meant *separate* education. But we now know that when children are educated together and with the appropriate support, positive academic and social outcomes occur for all the children involved. We also know that simply placing children with and without disabilities together does not produce positive outcomes. Inclusive education occurs when there is ongoing advocacy, planning, support and commitment."

By providing resources and fostering an environment in which developmentally disabled individuals can learn, live and work comfortably alongside their typically developing peers, educators can create an opportunity for all to advance—individuals, families and communities.

## The Small School Support Primer

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43]

of a resource room is vital, because it provides a place for small group or individual work with students that need it, and it also reflects that support is a priority. Allow for flexible scheduling of educational specialists, so they can support the general and Judaic studies programs with pull-out services.

It is important to realize that a Jewish day school, because of its dual curriculum, teaches to the high average student and there will always be unidentified students who will struggle in this environment. A system of support benefits all students and is a valuable investment in the diversity of your school, as well as your community.

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# Proactively Meeting the Needs of All Students in Day School

■ by **SANDY MILLER-JACOBS**

**T**HE picture of special education in Jewish day schools is far brighter today than it was even ten years ago, but for many parents it's still not adequate. Students with special needs continue to be excluded from day school, and parents can't understand why their children with special needs are not allowed to participate in the education offered in a day school environment. In

research Annette Koren and I performed of parent experiences related to their child with special needs and day schools ("Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Day Schools: Parent Experiences," in the 2003 *Jewish Education News*), parents felt that day schools need to decide whether they are interested in being "prep schools or Jewish schools." They spoke of the decision to have their child leave the school as though the decision had just been made, although in reality it had been years. They described the pain of having their child—and themselves—excluded from the day school community. A recently published *Forward* article by Tom Fields-Mayer, "Toward Day Schools for All Children," opens with the question posed by the author's son who has high functioning autism: "Why can't I go to the same schools as my brothers?"

This seems to leave us with two different perceptions. While parents see the glass as half empty, Jewish day schools see the glass as half full. Most day schools and Jewish special education programs believe they are successfully servicing students with special learning needs. Day school doors have opened wider over the past years, resulting in more children with special needs accepted and successfully retained in day school. There are currently students attending day school who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities, ADHD, cerebral palsy, mood disorders, autism spectrum disorders, cognitive challenges, and sensory issues. However, not all schools service all these diagnoses or all levels of severity. Parents remain distraught that their child continues to be excluded because their learning needs cannot be met. We are left asking two questions: 1) What does it take for a day school to have the capacity to serve the variety of special learning needs of Jewish children who want to attend day school? 2) How does a school develop this capacity?

Several components are necessary to increase the capacity of a school to service students with a variety of types and levels of special needs. In my work with day schools, I have learned that it's not always about the specific diagnosis; rather, it is a combina-

tion of factors that help the student succeed. For example, while two students diagnosed with Asperger's who have similar strengths attend a day school, one continues through high school while the other is



**Sandy Miller-Jacobs, EdD**, professor of Jewish special education at Hebrew College and professor emerita of special education at Fitchburg State University, consults with Jewish school personnel to create inclusive classrooms and congregations. She can be reached at [sandymj@gmail.com](mailto:sandymj@gmail.com).

asked to leave after 7th grade. The diagnosis tells us little about why one student was able to complete 8th grade at one day school, transition to another day school, and graduate from 12th grade, while the other had to leave before completing the first day school. Clearly factors other than diagnoses play an important role in creating a successful environment. When these factors are in place, schools can be proactive in planning and programming for students with special needs.

## ADMINISTRATIVE AND BOARD VISION

The importance of creating an accepting atmosphere where all students are respected is an important factor underlying a day school's success in servicing students with special needs. Administrative vision related to special needs is equally as important as their vision for the school in general. Inclusion of students with special needs in the school is an integral part of how the school views students and their community. Administrators are reluctant to have their school seen by the community as a school for students with special needs for fear that parents will not enroll their children without special needs. Administrators and board mem-

bers need to be able to talk with potential and current parents about the importance of creating a learning community that responds to all students' uniqueness. One cannot underestimate the power of having the administration and board standing behind support service offerings, not only for the students but for the faculty as well.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING

One of the major complaints parents have voiced is their belief that the day school responded as though their child was the first and only student with special needs to attend the school. They talked about their surprise when they met other former day school parents who were now part of the local public school. There, they learned from special educators that there are many students with the same issues in the school.

Strategic planning helps to remove the stigma associated with special needs. Openly acknowledging that there are students in attendance who work with their special needs staff is a first step to strategically planning for special education. Identifying existing services in parent handbooks and on the school's website are simple ways to open the conversation. It seems like a little step, but for parents considering enrolling their child, who they know has special needs or whose special needs may not yet be apparent, it is reassuring to know that educational supports are in place if and when needed.

Having a plan in place helps parents and teachers know that if a problem occurs, there are people available who know how to address the issues presented. Procedures give admissions personnel the answers for parents who may ask about their child and what services they could receive. To hear what services are available, what procedures are in place for handling learning issues (e.g., how many hours of reading support can be offered, whether a "lunch bunch" exists for students who need a quiet space or a small group of students for social interaction, or what provisions are made if a child has a meltdown) gives reassurance to all parents that the school can handle the variety of issues that arise



**“ 1) What does it take for a day school to have the capacity to serve the variety of special learning needs of Jewish children who want to attend day school? 2) How does a school develop this capacity?**

from students with—and without—special needs. It's much the same as knowing that there is a nurse available if a child gets ill or needs medication (whether Amoxicillin or Ritalin).

When day schools have special educators and educational psychologists as members of their staff, when they have procedures established to create safety nets for struggling students, they can be proactive about creating programs that meet the needs of each student. These programs have to allow staff the creativity and flexibility to consider new issues should they arrive. Perhaps a child who is twice exceptional (i.e., gifted with a learning disability) attends the school; it takes a team effort to examine the array of possible solutions that can ensure the student's success. Possibilities include providing English translations for vocabulary and/or Hebrew text, organizing a smaller class section for a specific subject, dropping one subject from the student's schedule and substituting a remedial class. If a student needs additional therapies, for example with a speech and language pathologist or occupational therapist, partnerships with other organizations that provide therapists can offer these services, often directly in the school.

Building time for these professionals to meet with classroom and support staff to discuss the student's progress is important for this approach to be successful.

Cost of services should also be part of this planning. What amount of support can the school provide as part of their costs of running a school and how much should the parents provide if those services fall short of what their child needs? Obviously, at some point, the costs can be prohibitive and only parents who can afford it will be able to have their child attend. Therefore, it's important for financial aid or scholarships to be available, or arrangements with the public school need to be worked out within the guidelines of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act for parents who choose a private school setting.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The teacher is at the center of classroom learning, and his or her ability to respond to each student is at the core of the school's ability to create an inclusive school. Teachers need ongoing professional development to support their efforts at including students with special needs. Often schools

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 53]

# A Team Approach to Supporting Individualized Learning Needs

■ by **LENORE LAYMAN**

**L**EARNING support teams, the collaboration of teachers and specialists to provide for special learners, are of critical importance in the successful implementation of special education. The responsibilities of team members are extensive, including leadership roles in providing ongoing support to students, parents, teachers and school administrators. Team members need to be involved in the school admission process, early identification of student needs, goal setting, case management, defining accommodations and modifications, remediation, strategy instruction, study skills, differentiated instruction, curriculum mapping, assessment and setting standards for classes as well as school grading policies. Additionally, learning support teams often play an important role in guiding parents through the process of understanding their child's strengths and challenges and helping students through the demystification process and towards self advocacy.

Successful learning support teams are most productive when they are student centered, focused on goal setting and collaborative problem solving, and committed to consistently tracking progress and celebrating successes, no matter their size. The needs of the student should always be the focus of the goal setting and problem solving that takes place in the team. Who are the players on the school's learning support team? That will depend on the size of your school and your resources. At the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School (CESJDS), our lower school (K-6) learning support team includes the child's parents, general studies and Judaic studies teachers, the general studies learning specialist and Hebrew learning specialist when appropriate, the child's guidance counselor, grade level administrator and any outside professionals that may be involved in working with the child.

At CESJDS, the team is convened and led by the general studies learning specialist who assumes the role of the child's case manager. For some students, there may be 10 people sitting around the table at monthly team meetings and for others, it is not necessary for a school administrator or guidance counselor to be involved and the team meets formally just twice a year. For day schools with more modest

resources, learning support teams can be led by a school guidance counselor or administrator and include the parents and child's teachers. In situations in which a student is receiving the majority of support privately, the private clinician may play a leadership role on the team if appropriate. Some smaller schools may



*Lenore Layman is Director of Educational Support Services at Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Maryland. She can be reached at llayman@cesjds.org.*

consider hiring private consultants on a contract basis for a certain number of hours per year to play either a leadership or consulting role in school learning support teams.

Private clinicians in the field who develop a relationship with a school can play an important role in guiding goal setting, problem solving and being involved in a number of the priority areas described earlier. Schools will always encounter situations in which the needs of the students cannot be accommodated within the school, or the resources that the school has available are not extensive enough to properly support the student's needs. Even in situations like this, it is of paramount importance for the needs of the student to drive the goal setting, problem solving and decision making that takes place.

Having a trained and experienced special educator on the team who is the child's learning specialist and case manager is an ideal scenario. Finding a professional

who is trained in research-based, multi-sensory, systematic methods of teaching reading and writing in addition to having expertise in case management, professional development and working with parents is important. At CESJDS, our staff of learning specialists play a central role in not only leading the team but in communicating information and designing and providing support to many students, teachers and parents.

In our lower school, support that students receive from learning specialists frequently includes direct services. Students may receive small group or individual pull-out support for remediation or multi-sensory strategy instruction in areas that could include decoding, fluency, reading comprehension, writing, study strategies or organization. Other students receive direct services in their classroom in addition to or instead of pull-out support. The decision as to the type and frequency of support students receive always leads back to goals set by the team at educational management team meetings. Education

plans are written for each student receiving direct services. Other students have no need for direct service from a school learning specialist but require the learning specialist to write an accommodation

plan to ensure that their needs are consistently accommodated in the classroom.

student in our upper school receives is also determined by psycho-educational testing, which helps to guide decisions of the learning support team. The learning specialists also write education plans and accommodation plans for each student. As students progress through our support system, emphasis shifts to helping

**Successful learning support teams are most productive when they are student centered, focused on goal setting and collaborative problem solving, and committed to consistently tracking progress and celebrating successes, no matter their size. The needs of the student should always be the focus of the goal setting and problem solving that takes place in the team.**

In our middle and upper schools (7-12), support is more focused on study skills, organization and time management, which is provided in a structured study hall setting, staffed by our team of learning specialists. Support that each

students understand their own learning strengths and weaknesses, strategies that do and don't work for them and teaching them to become self advocates as they work towards more independence.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 52]

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[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 51]

Whether a school has one learning specialist or a more extensive team of educational support services staff like we do at CESJDS, it is critical that a large part of the role of the learning specialists is to work with both general studies and Judaic studies classroom teachers to help support them in meeting the needs of each and every one of the students in their classroom. Visiting classrooms on a regular basis and setting up regular meetings with individual teachers is essential for success in this area. For students with education and/or accommodation plans, many teachers need ongoing support to effectively provide certain accommodations and to integrate remediation and strategy instruction that students receive outside of the classroom into their classroom practice.

Of equal importance is working with teachers to incorporate differentiated instruction into their classrooms, ensuring they are meeting the educational needs of our school's strongest students while supporting our weaker students to reach toward the same standards of instruction. The learning specialists can collaborate with those involved in professional development to either lead school wide training in differentiated instruction or to play a supporting role with individual teachers that they work with.

Finally, another key role that learning specialists often play

ed mastery of a math concept on a pre assessment, is it fair to teach this concept to all students in the classroom or is necessary to differentiate the math lesson on that particular day so that these students are stretched to learn something new? Another

**Helping teachers embrace the philosophy that it is their responsibility to structure their classroom to meet the needs of all students across the learning spectrum is a key role that the learning specialist plays in the school.**

group of students may find it necessary for the teacher to provide manipulatives for them to use when practicing this new math skill while most of the class does not require this support. Helping teachers embrace the philosophy that it is their responsibility to structure their classroom to meet the needs of all students across the learning spectrum is a key role that the learning specialist plays in the school.

Just as every school has a wide spectrum of learners, learning support teams work with a wide spectrum of families and need to differentiate the role they play in supporting and guiding parents, depending on where each parent falls on the continuum. In some instances, team meetings will be the first time that learning or social challenges are called to a parent's attention. In other situations, a family will apply to a school having already had their preschooler tested, working with a speech and oc-

portunity to learn more about their child's needs. Having relationships with a team of outside professionals and suggesting families pursue a consultation with a psychologist, have a medication consult, consider a social skills group, or find a summer intensive tutoring program is all part of the responsibilities of the learning support team members. Providing opportunities for parent education to the entire school population is also important through in-house speakers, book groups and connections to lectures in the community.

When schools make the decision to invest in a strong learning support team, the positive impact that this philosophical and financial commitment brings is far reaching and powerful. The entire school community, including students, parents, teachers and administrators, all reap the benefits of the expertise, focus and collaboration that the various team members provide. It is essential for more and more Jewish day schools to make the commitment to meet the needs of a greater spectrum of learners and to find ways to assemble an effective team. Though it is not that hard to think creatively of how to assemble a team that meets the needs of your school, it will always be challenging to meet the learning needs of all students while maintaining a high quality secular and Jewish education. Despite the daunting challenges that this commitment can bring, keep in mind the words of Rabbi Tarfon: "You are not required to complete the task, yet you are not free to desist from it" (Pirkei Avot 2:16). ■

**When schools make the decision to invest in a strong learning support team, the positive impact that this philosophical and financial commitment brings is far reaching and powerful.**

in providing ongoing support to classroom teachers which connects to the philosophy and key components of differentiated instruction is helping teachers understand that fair doesn't always mean equal. If a group of students in the classroom have already demon-  
strat-

cational therapist and participating in a social skills group.

For families that are working with a team of outside professionals, the learning support team may play a significant role in case management and keeping

# Proactively Meeting the Needs of All Students in Day School

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 49]

provide in-service workshops where teams of teachers work together to learn, share and discuss new approaches. Classes at universities provide teachers with the opportunity to interact with teachers from other schools, to widen their professional network, and hear different perspectives. Hebrew College offers the only program in Jewish special education that integrates the field of special education with Jewish views, expanding educators' capabilities to educate the variety of special needs in the day school setting. Teachers of inclusive classrooms and special educators need to have the skills to instruct all students, to differentiate their classrooms and to provide remediation for students with learning difficulties. Classroom teachers need to make accommodations designed by special educators; they need time to plan and evaluate student progress together.

## COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

Communicating with parents is crucially

important for providing for students with special needs. For a parent whose child has already been diagnosed, their prior experiences can be helpful in establishing the supports needed. If the child is first being diagnosed, they need clear and concrete information about the issues observed, the child's re-

such services, it goes a long way in building the parent-professional relationship.

By creating an inclusive school, parents feel that their children are respected as individuals with unique strengths and challenges that the school can and will address. Parents need to know that the

**“Differentiated instruction began so that gifted children would remain challenged academically. Now we see that it is equally helpful for students who find learning a struggle.”**

sponses to various teaching methods and assignments, and steps to take. Successful relationship needs to be based on trust. Staff who usher the parents through the IEP process with the local public school provide an immense support, helping to create a trusting relationship. Learning that your child has learning issues is not easy for any parent. If the day school can assure the parents they have services and students who already take advantage of

approaches and strategies used in school are helpful for all students, but are necessary for those with special learning needs. Differentiated instruction began so that gifted children would remain challenged academically. Now we see that it is equally helpful for students who find learning a struggle. Day schools need to continually focus on students' academic and social learning so that all who wish a day school education can receive one. ■



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# Inclusion for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

■ by **CANDICE BAUGH** and **ELIZABETH ROBERTS**

**C**HILDREN with autism are so varied that an ordinary person meeting two or more of them might be puzzled that their conditions fall under the same name. This is why child mental health professionals have settled on the term “autism spectrum disorders,” or “ASDs,” to describe this heterogeneous group.

Many children with autism spectrum disorders can be taught in mainstream, “inclusion” settings. Careful evaluation of each child, the availability of a range of supports, creativity, flexibility, and good communication with parents are critical ingredients to success.

ASDs are lifelong neurodevelopmental conditions, meaning they are caused by impairments in the growth and development of the brain and its neural pathways. ASDs are characterized by marked, enduring, qualitative impairments in the areas of communication, social interaction, play and imagination, and the presence of a restricted range of interests. Communication impairments in ASD range across the spectrum from children who never acquire the ability to speak, to those who show advanced verbal ability but have difficulty using language and nonverbal communication in socially typical ways.

Social impairments likewise range from profound, in the child who shows only basic attachment to his caretakers, to mild, in the child who desperately wants to make friends but lacks an instinctive understanding of how to go about it. Repetitive behaviors and restrictive interests range from the child who persists in simple water play or the shaking of a favorite object, to the bright child who displays unusually intense or odd interests, in gum disease, or the history of the carousel, for example.

Children with ASDs also differ greatly with respect to the presence and severity of associated symptoms, including cognitive impairment, fine and/or gross motor skills delays, inattention, hyperactivity, and executive dysfunction (which includes deficits in planning, organization, and decision-making skills and impulse control), deficits in academic skills, anxiety and obsessiveness, mood swings, hypersensitivity to light, noise and other sensory stimuli, and difficulty sleeping.

A neuropsychological evaluation, which entails detailed testing to pinpoint a child’s unique abilities and deficits in learning and communicating, is critical to identifying his or her educational and therapeutic needs. While some form of neuropsychological testing is sometimes available at public schools, neuropsychological evaluations obtained from practitioners in the community or at a university-based hospital often offer a more in-depth assessment. In addition to comprehensive test-

ing, usually completed during a series of appointments, the evaluation process also includes taking a comprehensive history from the parents of behavior and symptoms since birth, as well as gather-



**Candice Baugh, MA, LMHC**, a licensed mental health counselor who specializes in the treatment of ASDs, ADHD, and anxiety disorders, is the program coordinator of the Social Cognition Program and an instructor of child and adolescent psychiatry at the NYU Child Study Center. She can be reached at [Candice.Baugh@nyumc.org](mailto:Candice.Baugh@nyumc.org).



**Elizabeth Roberts, PsyD**, a clinical assistant professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at the NYU Child Study Center, is a neuropsychologist specializing in ASDs and other neuropsychiatric disorders. She can be reached at [Elizabeth.Roberts@nyumc.org](mailto:Elizabeth.Roberts@nyumc.org).

ing data from teachers or even directly observing a child in the classroom. The results of this process yield important information concerning intellectual ability and strengths, language ability and language pragmatics (the ability to use language appropriately in social circumstances), attention, executive functioning (including organization and decision making), visual and perception skills, motor coordination, social knowledge, recognition of faces and facial expression, learning, and memory.

The experienced neuropsychologist also gathers important clinical observations during the testing process, such as the child’s interests and unique personality, and his or her responses to humor, social overtures, and frustration. These results form the backbone for a set of recommendations for the child’s education, and for further therapeutic and psychiatric evaluations and services,

for the treatment of mood or behavior problems, for example. (It's important to distinguish between a neuropsychological evaluation, which identifies learning and cognitive issues, with a psychiatric one, which diagnoses other symptoms of mental illness and is necessary in order to receive medication.) A good neuropsychological report flags a child's strengths and offers specific prescriptions for the remediation of weaknesses. Parents may also seek out occupational, speech/language, or physical therapy evaluations. Evaluations can be obtained privately or through the school district.

Once a child has been evaluated and his doctors, parents and teachers have developed an educational plan, there is a range of academic supports available to children with ASDs. Classroom accommodations and modifications are often sufficient to meet the needs of less challenged students. These may include preferential seating in a teacher's "target zone," modifying homework and in-class assignments, providing extra time on tests and class assignments, or offering an extra set of books to children with organizational problems, to help ensure they have materials they need to complete assignments both at home and at school.

A mainstream inclusion classroom may offer the presence of an extra "push-in" teacher, often certified in special education, to help individual students or offer individualized instruction. Many private schools offer a resource room (referred to as a "pull-out"), where children can learn in small groups at their own pace with a teacher who has special education training. Professional development in the form of in-service training is another effective tool for increasing the ability of Jewish day schools to successfully include children with ASDs.

Teachers and their support staff can offer individualized help with executive functions such as initiating, persisting, and remaining focused on in-class activities. Sometimes a simple behavior modification plan—rewarding children for staying focused, completing tasks, or using good self-control—is helpful. Incentives for

## When Is It Necessary to Seek Other Options?

While many children with special needs are successfully educated in general education settings with supports, some children require a more specialized setting for either a particular phase of their educational career or its entirety. Children with significant cognitive impairment who struggle with basic abstract reasoning have difficulty participating in a mainstream curriculum. Children who are of average intelligence but have a learning disability, such as dyslexia, that is severe in degree, cannot keep up with academic demands and require a specialized placement in order to make progress. Children with medical conditions, for example, poorly controlled epilepsy, or a physical disability that prevents them from writing or using a keyboard, and children who have not acquired the ability to speak need to be placed in specialized settings. Children with severe psychiatric illness who are a danger to themselves, aggressive to others, or who show impairment in reality testing need a specialized placement until they have recovered and can return.

There are various public and private options for children who cannot succeed in general education settings. In the public schools, children can be placed in collaborative team-taught (CTT) or "inclusion" classrooms taught by two instructors, and offered a package of services such as therapies, an aide, social skills training, and guidance counseling. Public schools also have self-contained, small classroom settings of anywhere from 6 to 12 children that are often tailored to specific populations. There are also many out-of-district specialized schools, which parents can seek privately or petition their school districts to pay for.

Parents should not automatically assume that a placement outside a Jewish day school is "forever." Many children who are provided with an appropriate, individualized program of support make progress such that they then successfully transition or return to a general education placement. It is also important for parents and educators to be guided above all by what a child needs in the moment. We stress to parents that plans should be conceptualized for a one-to-two year time frame and that planning too far ahead is not helpful.

**A neuropsychological evaluation, which entails detailed testing to pinpoint a child's unique abilities and deficits in learning and communicating, is critical to identifying his or her educational and therapeutic needs.**

achieving goals can be delivered at school and at home.

Reading and writing disabilities often improve in response to evidence-based instructional methods such as the Wilson Reading program or other Orton-Gillingham-based methods. The Lindamood-Bell Program offers evidence-based instruction in reading,

writing, and math. Handwriting problems can be addressed by providing extra time, occupational therapy, and for older children, keyboarding instruction. Some children may need a modified physical education program due to gross motor delays.

Therapeutic services and other more in-

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 56]

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 55]

Individualized school supports for children in Jewish day schools are accessed and delivered in a variety of ways. They can be obtained privately from trained professionals and tutors in the community, from the school district via an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), or offered in-house by the child's school. An emerging trend is the on-site delivery of therapeutic services to Jewish day schools by non-profit Jewish organizations.

**Gateways:** Access to Jewish Education, based in Newton, Massachusetts, and Matan, located in White Plains, New York, are two examples. The location of service delivery can be the child's home, a clinic, the local public school, or the child's private school. For example, a school district may agree to provide a therapy or an individual aide (paraprofessional) who travels to the child's private school, or a child may travel after school to his or her local public school to receive a therapy.

Psychiatric and psychological evaluations provide additional, critical information concerning a child's emotional and behavioral profile and are crucial in the development of an appropriate intervention plan. For

agnostic profiles may also behave very differently at school in comparison to those diagnosed only with ASDs. For example, a child diagnosed with ASD may be noticeable in the classroom primarily due to social awkwardness and mild overreactions, while a child with an additional anxiety or mood diagnosis is apt to exhibit more

agitations. CBT is often accompanied by medications prescribed by a child psychiatrist.

Children may also receive speech/language therapy for conversational and perspective taking skills (see [socialthinking.com](http://socialthinking.com)), occupational therapy as described above, and physical therapy to

## Children with significant associated symptoms of anxiety or depression that result in behavioral challenges at school and children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) with symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, or impulsivity, often benefit from having a paraprofessional in the classroom.

challenging behaviors, such as refusing to join in a classroom presentation. Rarely, a child with significant associated symptoms may exhibit extremely dysregulated behavior, e.g., panicking, meltdown, or leaving the classroom. Children with significant associated symptoms of anxiety or depression that result in behavioral challenges at school and children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) with symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity,

treat gross motor delays. Ideally, school counselors and psychologists work closely with parents in sharing a daily or weekly journal that is passed back and forth among a child's caregivers. Even basic status information jotted down quickly or emailed between parents and teachers can be invaluable, particularly if a child has had a rough day in school or a difficult morning at home.

Good working relationships between classroom teachers and the school counselor or outside psychologist are also crucial. Teachers can provide observational information to help the psychologist formulate and modify an effective behavior plan. For children with greater emotional regulation difficulties, school behavior plans, with step-by-step meltdown protocols, and a quiet room can offer safe ways to calm down. Staff training in the management of irritability, low frustration tolerance, and meltdowns is often important to a successful school placement.

Behavior plans can also be used for managing less disruptive behaviors such as asking repetitive questions, as well as to encourage positive social behaviors being taught in therapy, e.g., appropriate ways to initiate conversation. Rewards are an important component of behavior plans in order to reinforce increases in positive social behavior and decreases

**“Training peers to be social mentors in the classroom or at recess is a very forward-thinking model of encouraging positive social interaction that benefits children with social difficulties and gives typically developing children the opportunity to perform a mitzvah.”**

example, a more mildly affected child with ASD may need social understanding and skills instruction both at home and through individual therapy as well as the guidance of a classroom teacher to facilitate social interaction. However, if such a child also has an anxiety disorder, he or she will benefit from individual therapy targeting these symptoms, and possibly a referral to psychiatry as well.

Children with more complicated di-

or impulsivity, often benefit from having a paraprofessional in the classroom. Paraprofessionals can also be trained to facilitate and improve social interaction.

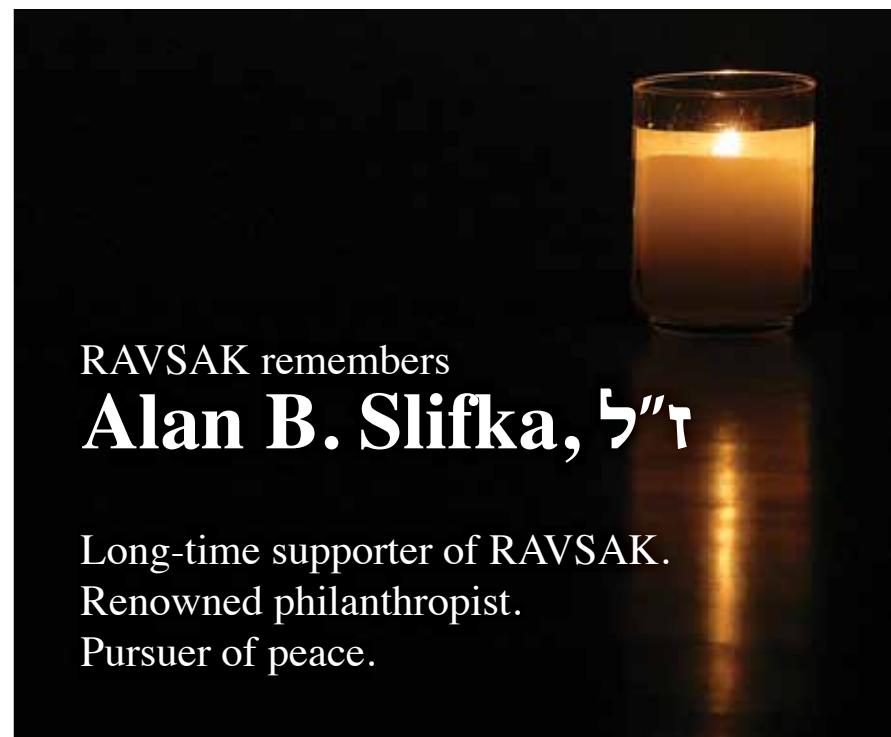
Children with ASD do best with an array of therapeutic supports within the school setting, in the community, or in combination. Mental health needs are addressed with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), in which the therapist helps the child change the way she thinks and responds in difficult situ-

in problem behavior. Training peers to be social mentors in the classroom or at recess is a very forward-thinking model of encouraging positive social interaction that benefits children with social difficulties and gives typically developing children the opportunity to perform a mitzvah.

In summary, many children with ASDs can be accommodated in mainstream inclusion settings, particularly when recommendations provided through comprehensive neuropsychological and psychiatric reports are followed carefully by both schools and parents. Flexibility is key, as children's needs evolve. A program becomes a living, dynamic process of support requiring continual attention and adjustment over time. These adjustments may require periodic updates of previous evaluations, or new evaluations and services.

Some services may also be discontinued as goals are reached or issues resolved. For example, while ASDs and ADHD are often lifelong diagnoses, anxiety and mood disorders can resolve or change across development. A child's social awareness and self-management skills often improve over time as a result of intervention and brain maturation. The appropriate package of supports changes with each phase in development and needs regular, critical review particularly at transition points, for example at the end of middle school, junior high, and high school.

While working with the learning and emotional differences of children with autism can create challenges in any setting, accurate evaluations and appropriate supports can promote school success. Integrating children with ASDs and other differences creates an opportunity to teach the values of inclusivity, fairness, and acceptance. Jewish day schools have the opportunity to model to the Jewish community at large what is possible in teaching children both academics and shared values. ■



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# ADHD: What Teachers Need to Know

■ by MELANIE FERNANDEZ

**E**VERY teacher has heard about attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, even if he or she isn't sure of the exact diagnostic criteria. Kids throw around the term "ADHD" in the same way they casually diagnose others with obsessive-compulsive disorder or schizophrenia. A well-organized child is "so OCD," a child whose ideas seem a little unusual is a "schizo," a child with lots of energy is "ADHD." These schoolyard diagnoses have little in common with the real thing.

The fact is that ADHD is a real psychiatric disorder with real consequences for young people. Not every high-energy or impulsive child has ADHD, and kids who do have the disorder are significantly affected by it. In fact, "clinically significant impairment" is one of the diagnostic criteria. The other criteria are inattentive, hyperactive, and impulsive symptoms—difficulty sitting still, staying focused, following directions, listening without interrupting, controlling impulses—that interfere with learning over time, as teachers are aware, but also with many other aspects of their lives.

ADHD is not a learning disorder, though it certainly affects learning. It is a complex cognitive and behavioral disorder. Clearing up this misconception is crucial to understanding both the disorder and the treatment. Children with ADHD have deficits in many of the functions (sometimes called executive functions) we develop to manage ourselves and accomplish tasks. These difficulties not only put them at a disadvantage in terms of learning; they are often associated with disruptive or problematic behavior, in school, at home, and even socially. (In fact, if children don't show the symptoms in at least two settings, it's not ADHD.)

Untreated, adolescents with ADHD are not only more likely to drop out of school; they are more likely to get themselves into a host of bad situations: car accidents, drug use, early pregnancy, and run-ins with the law. As adults, they have more difficulty sustaining relationships, parenting, and holding jobs.

The good news is that there are very effective new treatments for children with ADHD—not only medications, but also finely tuned behavioral therapies. By working with kids, parents, and teachers, we have developed techniques that can substantially minimize problematic behaviors and allow children to function more happily and successfully in the context of both their families and their classrooms. And because children with untreated ADHD can be difficult for teachers to manage—consuming a frustrating amount of your time and attention—techniques to help them function better are good for the rest of the class, too.

As a clinical psychologist, I focus on behavioral interventions, often in conjunc-

tion with psychiatrists, if children diagnosed with ADHD are candidates for medication as well. The medications psychiatrists sometimes prescribe, which are called psychostimulants, are not about "fixing" a child; they're about improving and enabling his or her relationship with the world. Researchers think these



*Melanie Fernandez, PhD, is a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute's ADHD and Disruptive Behavior Disorders Center ([childmind.org](http://childmind.org)). She can be reached at [Melanie.fernandez@childmind.org](mailto:melanie.fernandez@childmind.org).*

compounds slightly alter brain chemistry that is atypical in children with ADHD, but they don't change who a child is. Medication can make an inattentive child more available for instruction; an impulsive child better able to stop a behavior that might get him in trouble; a hyperactive child more aware of the needs and desires of others.

These and more are the goals of behavioral intervention. And because a child's primary relationship is with his or her parents, the most effective way to reduce symptoms is behavioral therapy that involves that relationship.

I practice a therapy called PCIT, or Parent-Child Interaction Therapy. The specifics can be a bit daunting—it can involve one-way mirrors, and parents wear earbuds to receive instruction from therapists—but the goal is simple: repairing the relationship between parent and child by encouraging affection and trust, on the one hand, and, on the other, teaching very specific disciplinary skills that give children well-defined limits and parents tools to deal calmly with problem behaviors. This approach may sound like com-

mon sense—and it is—but the methods are cutting edge, and supported by scores of studies that support its effectiveness.

The findings from PCIT got us all thinking. If the training in our PCIT sessions can help children control their own behavior, and parents calmly manage incidents when kids need to be reined in or redirected, could it be an effective tool for teachers?

That's the impetus behind TCIT—Teacher-Child Interaction Training. The idea here is that teachers can be trained to use the rapport-building techniques of PCIT, as well as the disciplinary ones, to make difficult classrooms easier to govern, and more ready to be taught. The benefit to students as well as to teachers in terms of their stress levels is increasingly being supported by research.

So what is your role as a teacher? It's two-fold. First of all, you may often be the person who will first notice that a child has psychiatric or learning problems. That's because you spend so much time with each of the children in your classrooms, but also because you are often in a better position to recognize the significance of a set of behaviors. Parents generally have a sample size of one or two or three children; you have a sample of 20 or 30, and over a teaching career, hundreds of children. If you have concerns, please don't waste any time before letting parents and other relevant individuals at your school know. Whether it's ADHD or an anxiety disorder, the sooner a child gets treatment, the less damaging the problem will be to his or her development, and the better the prognosis.

The next step, if a child is diagnosed with ADHD or another psychiatric disorder, is to be a member of what we call the "treatment team" of significant adults in that child's life.

What does this mean? If your student is on medication, it means making sure he or she gets it on schedule and occasionally completing short rating scales to help the treatment team keep track of how well the medication is working. If a child is undergoing PCIT or another behavioral ther-

## How TCIT Works

Teacher-Child Interaction Training, or TCIT, is a school-based variant of Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, or PCIT. Where PCIT seeks to improve a strained parent-child relationship and use it to reduce problem behaviors in a child, TCIT uses the disciplinary techniques and findings of PCIT to help teachers manage difficult students and classrooms.

In TCIT, clinicians train teachers on how to speak to their students and react to desired and undesired behavior. Central to TCIT are PRIDE skills that guide a teacher's response to desired behavior, promoting positive interactions with students. These PRIDE skills are: Praise appropriate behavior; Reflect appropriate speech; Imitate and Describe appropriate behavior; and be Enthusiastic. Teachers use PRIDE on the *opposite* of inappropriate behavior to give concrete examples of good behavior. They also praise or describe appropriate behavior of students during another student's misbehavior, which often motivates improvement.

Teachers also learn to state explicitly what positive or negative consequences are associated with a behavior. One key is the use of "when-then" and "if-then" statements: for example, "When you raise your hand, then I can call on you," or "If you don't color on your paper, then I will have to put the crayons away." When consequences come, they are contextually relevant, so children know exactly why.

The goal of TCIT is not only a well-behaved class but a positive relationship between student and teacher that can benefit the learning process.

Trainers do live coaching of TCIT skills with teachers in class with students, and evaluate teacher-child interactions to determine the efficacy of the training based on standardized scales. TCIT has a growing evidence base.

More and more, studies are showing that the use of TCIT skills in the classroom reduces disruptive and aggressive behavior while increasing compliance. In addition, teachers report a high degree of satisfaction with the training.

py, it means being a part of that therapy in some way—meeting with parents and the child's therapist to learn what's working for the child. Evidence shows that consistent use by as many adults in a child's life as possible makes behavioral techniques more effective for that child. A combination of ample positive reinforcement for desired behavior and clear, consistent consequences for undesirable behavior is surprisingly effective in helping children become more cooperative.

If you are the teacher of children being treated for ADHD, even if you're not involved with a TCIT program, keep this in mind: the treatment is allowing them to access learning opportunities that their

disorder, untreated, denies them. Treatment is also allowing them to improve their relationships with key figures in their lives—including you—but they may have some catching up to do. So be patient; help them along in a development that has, in some senses, been delayed.

And seek out new opportunities. TCIT and similar programs are still in their infancy, but a new movement is afoot among mental health professionals to strengthen the necessary and vital relationships with teachers that can help our children so much. Help us in that. If you let your voices be heard, perhaps more teachers will have access to the tools that can dramatically change a child's trajectory. ■

# Teaching Inclusion: The Whys and Hows

■ by RUTH GORRIN

NE of the basic concepts of Jewish thought is the idea that everyone is created betzelem Elokim, in the image of G-d. This idea frames the way individuals should view others. Students need to recognize that each human being is unique, important and of equal value.

Yet children often fear people with disabilities. They are uncomfortable, don't know what to say or where to look, and see disabled people as "other." To deal with this conflict between ideal and real, Tehiyah Day School formalized a program to teach about disabilities. Fourth grade was seen as the optimal grade in which to institute the program, since 9 year olds are able to think abstractly and see things from others' perspective.

We begin by exploring the ways in which we are all alike and different, either through discussion, use of Venn diagrams, or the assignment of short essays that students share with the class. Students learn that everyone possesses the same feelings, hopes, etc., and that everyone has unique characteristics as well as an individual pattern of strengths and limitations. A "pre-test" gives students a chance to think about the possible *abilities* of people with disabilities.

It is helpful to focus specifically on different types of disabilities one at a time, including vision and hearing impairment, orthopedic difficulties and differences, learning problems, and developmental disabilities. For each type of disability, students can be taught facts about how the body functions and may fail to function. They

learn that there are many forms of low vision and hearing impairment in addition to total blindness and complete deafness. Most children are fascinated by Braille and American Sign Language, eager to learn the basics, and excited by being able to finger-spell their names. It is also enlightening for them to spend an hour or more blindfolded for homework. They find that some tasks are easier than expected, some harder. They are stretched to imagine how a blind person can do these tasks, perhaps in a different way or with special tools.

There are many books about disabilities available now, including fiction and nonfiction, children's and young adult novels, and picture books. Although older stories often portrayed people with disabilities as pitiable (Clara and Peter's blind grandmother in *Heidi*), evil (Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*), super-human (anything about Helen Keller) or foolish (the dwarfs in the Disney version of *Snow White*), most new literature show people with disabilities leading normal lives, or discovering that

being *different* does not mean being *less*.

The most powerful and important part of learning about disabilities is meeting guests who come into the classroom to answer questions about themselves. People with disabilities tend to be more hurt by the attitudes and behaviors of the uninformed than by their disabilities, so they often enjoy speaking with the stu-



Ruth Gorrin has been teaching at Tehiyah Day School since 1983. She can be reached at [rgorrin@tehiyah.org](mailto:rgorrin@tehiyah.org).

dents and helping them change their attitudes and behavior. Students can have their natural curiosity satisfied by asking anything they want to know. They see and handle some of the many adaptive

“People with disabilities tend to be more hurt by the attitudes and behaviors of the uninformed than by their disabilities, so they often enjoy speaking with the students and helping them change their attitudes and behavior.

aids used by people with disabilities, open and close a prosthetic hook, play with a Braille domino set, and so on. More importantly, they make new friends and get to know the guests as *people*, who can do pretty much the same things as everyone else, perhaps only slower or in a different way or with the use of special equipment.

It's not difficult to find guests. If you live in a college town, there is likely to be a department for disabled students. Other communities have services for supporting independent living. Many commu-

nities have wheelchair basketball, power soccer, and beep ball and goal ball for the blind. Once you start, many people will say, “Oh, I know someone you should invite,” or “My cousin has such-and-such disability and would be a great guest.”

Once you have established a climate of acceptance, students with hidden disabilities such as ADHD, dyslexia, and autism spectrum disorders may be willing to speak as guests for their classmates or younger students. My current and former students

who come in to speak find it a huge relief not to have to keep their disabilities a secret. The other children become accepting of behavior that is different, and understanding about accommodations. Children with disabilities can feel comfortable with the disability being just one aspect of who they are, one way that they are unique.

Visits should always be followed by written thank you notes (or a tape recording for a blind guest). Give students a chance to tell the guests what they learned and ap-

preciated. We officially close the unit with another chance at the same worksheet we used for a pre-test, when students demonstrate their awareness that people with disabilities have more in common with themselves than not, and more abilities than disabilities. In class discussion, they can explain why they thought someone would have a certain ability when other classmates thought differently. They also have a chance to compare their original page with this second one to see how their understanding has grown. ■

## Worksheet on Perceptions of People with Special Needs

If You . . . Could You . . .?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Read across and down the grid.

- If you think such a person **could** do this, mark 4.
- If you think such a person **could not** do this, mark 0.
- If you can't decide, you may put a ?.
- If you have time, add your own “If you...” and “could you...” ideas.

If you . . .	could you . . .	sing a song?	play ball?	fly a kite?	eat ice-cream?	grow flowers?	enjoy a movie?	hug a friend?	dance?
couldn't see well,									
couldn't hear well,									
couldn't walk well,									
were a little person,									
couldn't speak well,									

# Bookcase

HIS column features books, articles and websites, recommended by our authors and people from the RAVSAK network, pertaining to the theme of the current issue of *HaYidion* for readers who want to investigate the topic in greater depth.

## Books

Atwood, Tony. *The Complete Guide to Asperger Syndrome*.

Feuerstein, R., Feuerstein, R. S. & Falik, L. H. *Beyond Smarter: Mediated Learning and Brain's Capacity for Change*.

Feuerstein, R., Rand, Y. & Rynders, J. E. *Don't Accept Me as I Am: Helping "Retarded" People to Excel*.

Greene, R. W. *Lost at School: Why Our Kids with Behavioral Challenges Are Falling through the Cracks and How We Can Help Them*.

Heacox, D. *Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom*.

Lavoie, Richard. *The Motivation Breakthrough: 6 Secrets to Turning on the Tuned-out Child*.

Ibid. *It's so Much Work to Be Your Friend*.

Mesibov, Gary. *Understanding Asperger Syndrome and High-Functioning Autism*.

Miller-Jacobs, Sandy, and Koren, Annette. *Special Learning Needs in Day Schools: Parent and Community Responses*.

Moskowitz, N. S., ed. *The Ultimate Jewish Teacher's Handbook*.

Myles, Brenda Smith, and Adreon, Diane. *Asperger Syndrome and Adolescence*:

*Practical Solutions for School Success*.

Myles, Brenda Smith, and Southwick, Jack. *Asperger Syndrome and Difficult Moments: Practical Solutions for Tantrums, Rage, and Meltdowns*.

PEJE. *Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education, vol. IV: Serving Diverse Learners in Jewish Day Schools*.

Simon, S. R. et al., eds. *V'Khil Banay-ikh: Jewish Education for All*.

Soodak, Leslie and Erwin, Elizabeth. *Inclusive Education: What Every Parent Should Know*.

Tomlinson, C. A. *Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom*.

Wolf, L. S. *The Path to Success: Derech Tzlecha!*

## Books for Children

Christopher, Matt. *Wheel Wizards*.

Cohen, Floreva. *My Special Friend*.

Elder, Jennifer. *Different Like Me: My Book of Autism Heroes*.

Flodin, Mickey. *Signing For Kids*.

Garfield, James. *Follow My Leader*.

Hoopman, Kathy. *All Cats Have Asperger Syndrome*.

Lord, Cynthia. *Rules*.

McGinnity, Kate and Negri, Nan. *Walk*

*Awhile in My Autism*.

McMahon, Patricia. *Dancing Wheels*.

Polacco, Patricia. *Thank You Mr. Falker*.

Springer, Nancy. *Colt*.

Wolf, Bernard. *Don't Feel Sorry for Paul*.

## Online Resources

[www.aboutourkids.org](http://www.aboutourkids.org)

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

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

[www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org): Autism Society of America

[www.come-over.to/FAS/IDEA504.htm](http://www.come-over.to/FAS/IDEA504.htm): 504 Accommodations Checklist provided by the Nebraska Dept of Education

[www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org): Information concerning learning disabilities

[www.wilsonreading.org](http://www.wilsonreading.org): Wilson Reading Program

[www.lindamoodbell.com](http://www.lindamoodbell.com): Lindamood Bell Learning Process

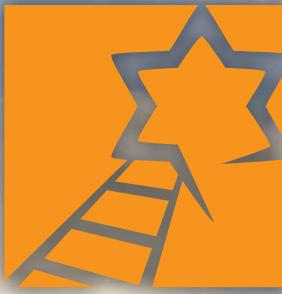
[www.jkp.com](http://www.jkp.com): Jessica Kingsley Publishers

[www.jgateways.org](http://www.jgateways.org): Gateways: Access to Jewish Education

[www.matankids.org](http://www.matankids.org)

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PROJECT



# SuLaM

Study · Leadership · Mentoring

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## Alumni Shabbaton

“

Holiness never felt so good! The Project SuLaM Shabbaton with Alan Morinis gave us all a deep, fresh look at this nebulous topic. Because of the camaraderie among us Sulamites, the learning was at the same time enlightening and comfortable. Alan’s expert guidance and questioning, along with the support flowing from my fellow Jewish school leaders, helped me see a whole new dimension of this spiritual element of Judaism.

—Tom Elieff, Head of School, Beth Yeshurun Day School, Houston, Texas; SuLaM Cohort 1 Participant

About 50 alumni of Project SuLaM convened for a Shabbaton of learning, spiritual connection and personal growth in Los Angeles during the weekend prior to the North American Jewish Day School Conference. As in previous years, the alumni Shabbaton is made possible by the continued vision and support of the AVI CHAI Foundation. This year for the first

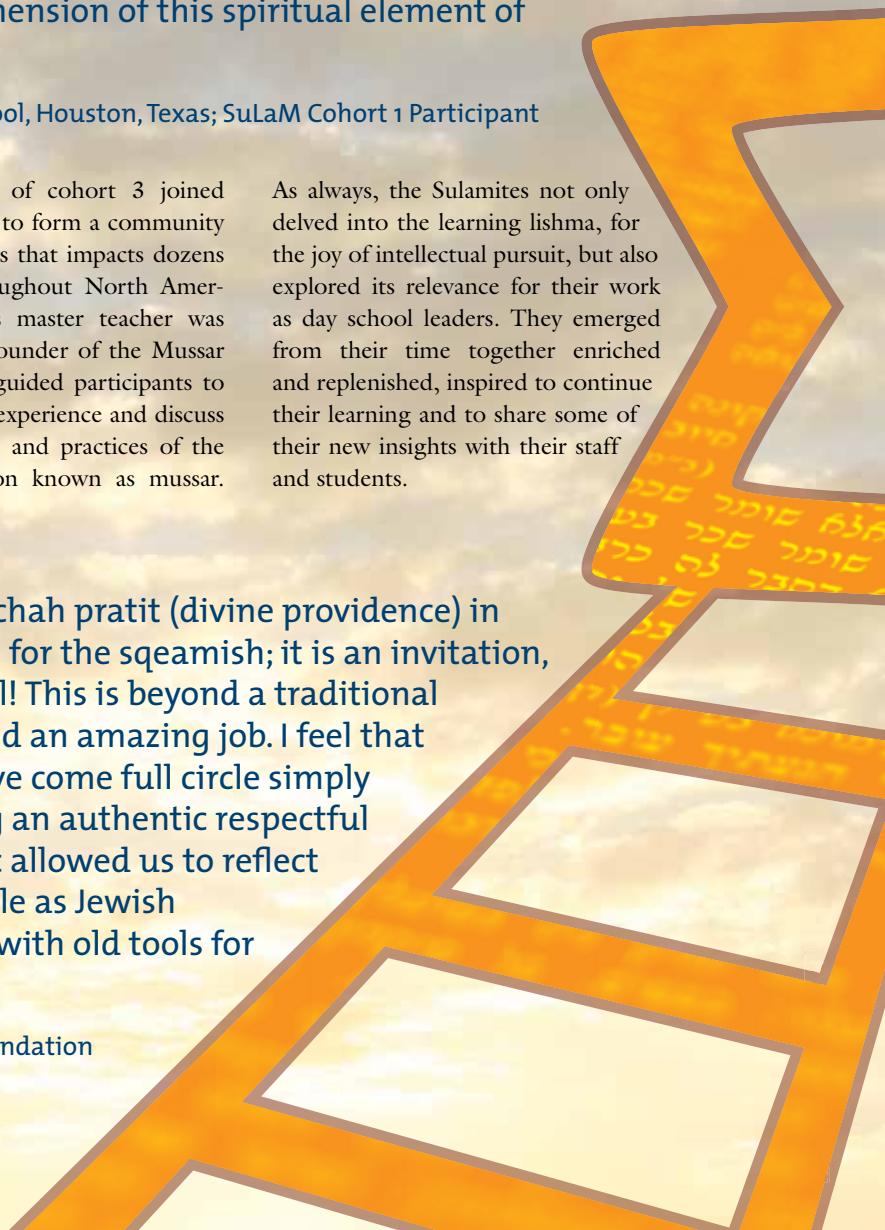
time, members of cohort 3 joined their colleagues to form a community of school leaders that impacts dozens of schools throughout North America. This year’s master teacher was Alan Morinis, founder of the Mussar Institute, who guided participants to come to know, experience and discuss the foundations and practices of the spiritual tradition known as mussar.

As always, the Sulamites not only delved into the learning lishma, for the joy of intellectual pursuit, but also explored its relevance for their work as day school leaders. They emerged from their time together enriched and replenished, inspired to continue their learning and to share some of their new insights with their staff and students.

“

The alumni shabbaton was hashgachah pratit (divine providence) in action. The topic—mussar—is not for the squeamish; it is an invitation, seeking to remove veils to the soul! This is beyond a traditional “guest speaker” role, yet Alan Morinis did an amazing job. I feel that being part of the SuLaM cohorts, we have come full circle simply because SuLaM is our ladder to creating an authentic respectful Jewish community day school. The topic allowed us to reflect deeply upon our own selves, our own role as Jewish educators. The shabbaton provided me with old tools for new beginnings.

—Rabbi Achiya Delouya, Head of School, Hebrew Foundation School, Montreal, Quebec; SuLaM Cohort 2 Mentor



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### **Project SuLaM: Study, Leadership and Mentoring.**

This unique, fully funded program is designed for Jewish professional day school leaders who are established educators yet to have a meaningful Judaic studies experience of their own.

Project SuLaM also provides the unusual opportunity for more Judaically knowledgeable heads to serve as mentors.

Limited to 18 participants and 5 mentors from

North American Jewish day schools of all affiliations, Project SuLaM empowers heads and other key administrators to more deeply engage in and advocate for the Jewish life of the schools they lead.

Participants earn a generous honorarium and support for Judaic professional development. Schools receive financial and professional support for Judaic change projects.

For more information, please contact Elliott Rabin, Director of Educational Programs, at [elliott@ravsa.org](mailto:elliott@ravsa.org) or 212-665-1320.

Project SuLaM is funded by  
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