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Guiding Principles for Jewish Day Schools

Note: This set of guiding principles is an evolving document, which is partly based on the PEJE Excellence." The format is similar to that used by the Coalition of Essential Schools over the last years. We are sharing it for the first time, and we invite your feedback on it. This is not a finished document, nor is it intended to be coercive. Our hope is that conversation around a guiding set of principles will contribute over time to raising the level of Jewish educational discourse on day school excellence, and will help all of us to focus our energies in ways which are most likely to nurture school excellence over the long run.

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VISION

The school should be guided by a shared and coherent vision for a vibrant Jewish community including an articulation of that community's relationship to the general society-at-large. The vision speaks about the distinguishing qualities of the model graduate of the school, with explicit reference to characteristics of the desired Jewish community which the school is trying to foster, and to the responsibility of each graduate to the Jewish community and to the general society. The vision incorporates a clear view of the relationship among Jews in America, Israel, and around the world. The statement of vision is an evolving document which should be re-visited on a regular basis.)

JEWISH TEXTS AND LEARNING

The day school should define itself as a community of learners, which includes all those connected to the school. Torah study should permeate the life of the school, including curriculum, classroom applications, faculty meetings, board meetings, parent association functions, and within the outreach efforts of the school into the broader community. School leadership should recognize that Jewish texts (in various forms) represent the ultimate source of inspiration for the current practices and future growth of the school. These texts and learning guide intellectual and spiritual growth, and serve as the binding thread of the school community.

Authentic access to and engagement in traditional text requires facility with Hebrew. A strong Hebrew program serves the dual purpose of forging a link to the Jewish community in Israel, and providing the language skills needed to understand Judaic texts in their original.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The school should devote itself to the spiritual development of all members of its community. All

Joshua Heschel has written eloquently about the educational imperative of inspiring wonder and an integral part of all education. "Judaism is not merely a matter of external forms - it is also a matter of inner living." Opportunities abound to structure experiences and learning which promote spiritual and religious development; the school should make good use of the many possibilities which present themselves through all facets of the day and of the educational program.

JEWISH VALUES, JEWISH PRACTICES, AND JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD

The environment and relationships within the school should be characterized by an unequivocal commitment to *derech eretz* (respect and decency) in all interactions, with the operative principle that all people are created in the image of God. Other Jewish values which should be woven into the fabric of the school and into learning about living in a democratic society include (but are not limited to) *tzedakah*, *gemilut hasadim*, *tzedek*, *hesed*, *klal Yisrael*, *am Yisrael*, *eretz Yisrael* and *tikkun olam*. The daily, weekly, and yearly cycle of the Jewish calendar also contain numerous practices and experiences which should figure prominently in the life of the school (e.g., *Tefillah*, *Brachot*, *Kashrut*, *Shabbat*, *Hodesh*, High Holidays, Festivals, just to name a few of the more prominent ones). These values and practices should be evident in curriculum, in faculty discussions, in student projects, in extra-curricular activities, and in the physical appearance of the facility.

Of particular note is a special bond with the State of Israel. This bond may manifest itself through units, special programs, celebrations, travel, and Hebrew as the unifying language of the Jewish people.

COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

The school should strive for excellence in all facets of its educational program and in the way it conducts its day-to-day operations. The culture of the school should support the accessing of expertise on a needed basis in a variety of areas. Dedication to promoting ongoing professional development; reflective practice for faculty and administration, and participation in periodic self-evaluation and accreditation processes are powerful, specific examples of an investment in excellence. The commitment to excellence should not be limited to intellectual pursuits, but should also include the aesthetic and spiritual. The religious expression and sensitivities of students, faculty, and parents must be nurtured on a regular basis.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING FOR ALL

The pedagogy within the school should reflect as much as possible the accumulating knowledge of how children learn most effectively, including those children with special learning needs. Specific to young people need to be engaged in their learning and they need to have opportunities to construct their own meaning and understanding, rather than just repeating what is in a text or memorizing a set of details. Cooperative and/or *hevruta* learning can be an effective tool in helping to foster student engagement. The paradigm of learning as telling and teaching as listening can be a helpful guide in shifting the focus away from student passivity to a more active learning environment. The building of common threads across the curriculum in order to forge a more holistic learning experience is a dimension to active engagement. Worthy of special note is the vital role played by the arts in promoting engagement, learning, and enthusiasm.

HABITS OF MIND

The general and Judaic studies program should work together to promote habits of mind within students which are necessary for a well-educated individual. Deborah Meier's habits center on the use of questions by students, a characteristic of traditional Jewish study as well. Her habits include: asking questions about how does one know; asking for another viewpoint; seeking connections and patterns; asking the question what would happen if; and asking whether it matters or who cares. (Each is encouraged to engage in an active and ongoing dialogue to define the habits of mind which they most like to cultivate.)

HIGHLY PROFESSIONAL AND COLLEGIAL ENVIRONMENT FOR FACULTY

Faculty members should see themselves as forming a highly professional community of perpetual learning and should work to foster a collegial environment where the key issues of educational practice are routinely discussed. The school should devote serious time and financial resources to the support of faculty's professional development, including coaching toward new skills and risk-taking in an environment of support. In the words of Roland Barth: "I am convinced that the relationship among adults within the school has more to do with the school's quality and character, and with the accomplishments of the school than any other factor." Seymour Sarason speaks more specifically about the collegiality imperative: "Teachers (must) accept the obligation as a group to develop a forum specifically devoted to their own growth and development, a forum that acknowledges that there is a world of ideas, theory, research, and practice about which they should be knowledgeable." The professional leader of the school should hold

to the highest standards of performance in all facets of their work.

BUILDING COLLABORATIONS

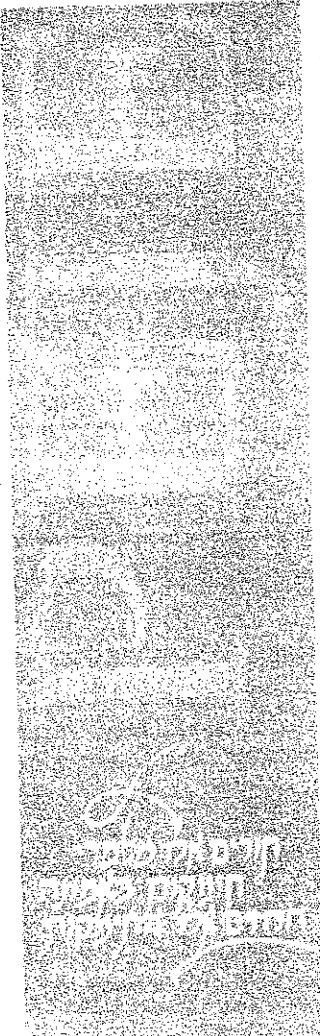
Families and synagogues, and other institutions and settings within the Jewish community should partners in fulfilling the educational mission of the Jewish day school, and the school should act to create such partnerships. Close collaboration among home, school, synagogue, youth group camps will help create a more supportive total environment for the Jewish and general educatic program. Deserving of particular attention is the unique and rich role that Israel should play with educational and programmatic life of the school. The growing interest in Jewish learning providi unprecedented opportunities for crafting new collaborations. Finally, the capacity to address the educational needs of a wide range of students may be enhanced through careful partnership wi initiatives and settings.

HIGH STANDARD OF BOARD PERFORMANCE

The Board should include individuals spanning a wide range of expertise, with all members know about and committed to the vision and priorities of the school. The Board should function at all t clear understanding of its role. Each individual Board member should be committed to his/her o as a non-profit school trustee, and to forging an effective leadership partnership with the profes: Head of School. Each member should serve actively on at least one working committee of the E Worthy of special mention is the work of the nominating committee or committee on trustees wt be charged with the key task of evaluating the work of the Board and ensuring that there is an implemented plan for developing and bringing on strong lay leadership for the future, including i attention to those individuals who do not have children in the school. Special care must be givei that there are a sufficient number of non-parent Board members.

LAY-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION

The professional and lay leadership of the school should perform their work in a collaborative m where roles are clearly defined, and where communication, reflection, and evaluation are ongoi forthright. The efforts of the lay leadership must include attention to the needed supports for the School, including training, coaching, professional development, and other forms of professional personal supports which can promote success and a sustained period of continuous leadership collaborative effort between lay and professional in the service of the school's mission should b by a set of strategic objectives which have been mutually agreed upon by the key constituencie school.



*Teachers and school children —
precious jewels of our community*
מורים וילדי היום הם אבני חן של הקהילה

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