



THE AUERBACH CENTRAL AGENCY  
FOR JEWISH EDUCATION



STARTING THE YEAR RIGHT!

FOR EDUCATION DIRECTORS

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## **For all of the Education Directors**

This collation is intended to help you begin each year with the full support of your staff, parents, and lay leaders. Strong organizational and administrative skills are among the ingredients for a successful year. Creating a caring and purposeful community for your school will be a model for the kind of Jewish Living we hope for all of our students and families.

I would like to thank all of my colleagues who contributed articles for this booklet. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Rochelle Rabeeya, Co-Director of Educational Services and Resources.  
Revised August 2008



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## A SUGGESTED TIME LINE Rochelle Rabeeya



**July** – Create and/or update faculty handbook

**August** – First (kick-off) school committee meeting; set priorities for the coming academic year

**1<sup>st</sup> week of September** – Opening staff meeting: set educational priorities for the year; distribution of faculty handbook

**November/December** – Complete first faculty evaluation and feedback

**January** – Start budget preparation for the following year

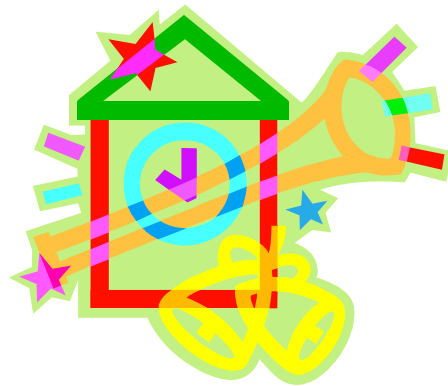
**February/March** – Complete second staff evaluation and feedback

**March** - Start creating calendar for next academic year  
Presentation of school budget to finance committee

**Late April** – Letter of intent for returning staff – to be returned by May 15

**May/June** – Public recognition of faculty  
Closing faculty meeting re: feedback on texts, general school programming, and curriculum (if staff is large, discussion may be more effective if done by grade level or age levels, i.e., primary, middle, junior high school, high school)

Celebrate with faculty and school committee a year well-done!



# CREATING SCHOOL COMMUNITY GUIDELINES FOR PRINCIPALS

Sharon Charish

## EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS FUNCTION AS COMMUNITIES!!

Do your school and its constituents form a community or a collective? To help you reflect on this question, here is a definition of community:

“The social space in which students and teachers in association do the work of problem solving, celebration, consolation, and creation. The best community - it will be imperfect – is one in which each constituent finds relationships where his/her gifts are recognized and magnified.”

- Sociologist, John McKnight

### Before school begins . . . teachers first!

Harvard educator, Roland Barth notes that school faculties often interact as toddlers in a sandbox, who parallel play rather than productively interact. If your teachers DO interact, is it on the level of congeniality, discussing the latest movie or new restaurant, or collegiality, working together and sharing ideas and insights about educational matters?



Some suggestions to forge a collegial community among your teachers:

- ◆ Start your first teachers meeting with an inspirational message which describes your mission, educational vision, a hope or theme for the year.
- ◆ Do an ice breaker activity for teachers to get to know each other professionally, e.g.,

On an index card write:	Discuss with a partner or small group:
Your Hebrew name	Special character trait(s) of the person you were named for
Your favorite holiday	A strategy you use to teach something about that holiday
A Bible hero you like to teach about	A value you try to inculcate through stories about this hero

On an index card write:	Discuss with a partner or small group:
A very successful teaching moment	The circumstances of this teaching moment
Something you'd like to <i>learn</i> from this year	What you think you will need to do to accomplish this learning

Each teacher then introduces his or her partner, telling his or her name and one piece of information about them. (Of course any questions that reflect teaching can be substituted for the above!)

- ◆ Have teachers brainstorm suggestions for professional development.




- ◆ Discuss school-wide policies with teachers regarding classroom management and homework. Empower teachers to work together as joint decision makers about these and other important issues through the creation of committees.
- ◆ Plan for teachers to team for *tefillah* or other special activities.
- ◆ Assign mentors/buddies to new teachers.
- ◆ Schedule staff meetings for the year to insure that teachers calendar their meeting responsibilities in advance. During subsequent faculty meetings, reserve some time for teachers to share successful materials and ideas with each other.

Kol Yisrael Areivin Zeh la Zeh: כל ישראל ערבין זה לזה

### Creating School Cohesiveness

Ritualizing behaviors by creating traditions and ceremonies helps to generate a strong community. All-school or all-grade activities promote school spirit, respect, caring and mutual concern. Judaism is replete with rituals and *minhagim*, thereby making this task more meaningful and authentic in the religious school setting. And we can also create our own new traditions.

Some suggestions for all-school traditions/activities:

- ◆ Know each other's names! Not only should you as principal know the children's names, but teachers and students should try to learn as many names as possible. This can be accomplished by:
    - an all-school or grade level naming contest
    - class, grade or cross grade interviewing
    - older/younger child buddying (a form of *hevruta*)
    - teacher and student greeters assigned as students arrive to school
  
  - ◆ Plan regular school or grade level meetings or assemblies in which a structure of rituals are established:
    - a particular song as students arrive and leave
    - a birthday *shehehyanu*
    - an honoring ritual for students' or teachers' accomplishments, *mitzvot* or *middot*
- 
- ◆ Create a school bulletin board with students' pictures related to a theme.
  
  - ◆ Orchestrate school wide theme activities revolving around
    - *tzedakah* projects
    - a *pitgam haḥodesh* (Jewish ethical theme of the month)
    - a holiday
  
  - ◆ Plan a special family event per grade level each year. (e.g. *Havdalah* workshop, *Tu B'Shvat Seder*, *Tzedakah* or *Mitzvah* Fair, Senior adult/student connection)
  
  - ◆ Organize a school *vaad* which functions like a student council or service organization. The *vaad* can also help to choose a student *bet din* for mediating difficult conflicts between students.

Remember that the advancements you make in fostering a Jewish, ethical, responsibly social school community will be well worth the time it will take! B'HATZLAKHA!!

## A PRINCIPAL'S PREPARATION FOR NEW RECRUITS AND NOVICE TEACHERS

Sharon Charish

An article in Educational Leadership (ASCD) says that "Teaching is a profession that eats its young." I think this statement is true. Particularly in Jewish schools, in which our survival is dependent upon committed and knowledgeable teachers, we need to do everything possible to insure a supportive learning environment for the teachers we hire.

In the spring of the year, as we begin to hire for the coming school term, we need to think about how to acculturate our new recruits.

Here are some suggestions to start you thinking:

- ◆ Build into your initial discussions and contract the expectations and opportunities for in-service professional development.
- ◆ Appoint a veteran teacher as a mentor/buddy for each new teacher. Conduct a meeting for only new teachers on administrative matters and curriculum. Invite the buddy to attend a serve lunch!  
It is not always necessary to offer a stipend to the buddy. Hopefully there are teachers who are committed to growth in the profession and will be willing to do this. However, I would recommend a lot of positive feedback and acts of appreciation to help the process along! (Please note: New teachers should also be invited to the meeting in which administrative matters and curriculum are reviewed with the entire faculty. The novices will need time to integrate the information, and it will be helpful to hear it twice!)
- ◆ Articulate all the things a new teacher needs to know. It is very important that all expectations are outline for new staff at the outset. For example, if your school gives report cards, a new teacher should see these in September so he/she knows what the expectations are for assessment. Homework policies should be explained. If there is a philosophy of discipline or management, or a procedure for requesting help or calling home, teachers need to know. Will he/she be responsible for a holiday program or a service at some point during the year? Any information about a child or family which will be helpful should be discussed. A teacher should know which children come from single parent families and if there is divorce or death. There should be no surprises.



- ◆ Plan a teachers' meeting in early September that includes an ice breaking activity. Teachers need not only to get to know each other, but also to discuss some of their common goals, concerns and struggles. You want to create a culture of "honeybees," colleagues who collaborate and work together – not a culture of "sand boxes," in which people are engaging in parallel play. This first meeting should include some substantive group learning, as well as administrative matters. Teachers need some inspiration at the beginning of the year.



- ◆ Help a new teacher by not placing the most difficult children in his/her class, if you have more than once class on a grade level. If you have no alternatives, be prepared to provide an extra measure of support. Research tells us that 25% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years.

- ◆ Build in time for teachers to prepare materials and set up the classroom.
- ◆ Provide resources and learning opportunities that support your belief that teachers need to be committed to life-long learning. Encourage them to be reflective about their practice by asking questions like, "What did you find successful in this lesson?" "What would you do differently next time?" "Do you think \_\_\_\_ was engaged?" etc.

- ◆ Give continual positive feedback to make teachers feel valued. Years ago when, as a principal, I saw a nice note I had written to a teacher affixed to her refrigerator at home, I realized how important it is to tell professionals that you appreciate their efforts.

Among the greatest joys of a school principal is having a teaching staff in place before the summer begins! We sweat and we fret each year over whether we will have a complete and competent teaching staff come September. However, the truth is that once the faculty is hired, our jobs have just begun!

Try to remember how you felt as a new teacher. I remember being terrified and emotionally exhausted! We need to work to make entry into the teaching profession less traumatic and more successful. Our Jewish future depends on it.

## PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH: HOW TO MAKE YOUR FIRST FACULTY MEETING MEMORABLE

Dr. Shoshana Silberman

We all know how busy the start of school can be. There is a temptation to use the first faculty meetings to bombard the teachers (especially novices or those new to the school) with data, check lists and advice. Often we overwhelm them with details and model for them exactly what we do not want them to do in the classroom. Below are some suggestions to consider that may help you move in a new direction.

- A. How do you explain the often long list of school policies and rules for teachers? Explain, in advance, that they should read your (well-written and concise) handbook because there will be a quiz game to see if everyone knows the rules. Develop a fun game, such as 'Jeopardy' based on school rules, (e.g., what to do when a child says he must leave early? When is *tzedakah* collected? May children use Yiddish names instead of Hebrew? What to do if a child misbehaves?)

Divide the faculty into teams, using your veteran teachers as captains, (a non-condescending, no-boring way for them to be reminded of policies!) You will be surprised at how much fun this can be and best of all, how much they will retain.

- B. Veteran teachers can also share their best advice with the new staff. For example, provide a list of twenty such items and let each pick their top three choices. New teachers are often eager to try the suggestions of their colleagues.
- C. Instead of telling them to set the proper mood in their classrooms, model this at your meetings. Begin with a short *D'var Torah*. Then have the teachers respond in small groups as to how this can relate to their teaching. This may get the teachers in the habit of being more reflective about their teaching.
- D. Another suggestion is to begin with a *kavanah* (a short meditation to spiritually prepare oneself for prayer, study or performance of a *mitzvah*.) Here is an example of a *kavanah* from the Talmud.

Before going in to teach, Rabbi Nehunia Ben Kana would say:  
*May it be your will my God, that no misunderstanding or confusion arise through my teachings. May my colleagues and students' value my learning, and may I value theirs. (Berakhot 28b)*

After sharing this, have each teacher compose his or her own, or do so in pairs or small groups. Have teachers share what they have composed.



It is in your hands to set the tone of the school. Whatever you choose to do, ask yourself "Is this what I want teachers to be doing in the classroom?" Your creativity can inspire your staff to make classroom life lively, active and engaging.

## FIRST DAY ALL-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Rabbi Ellen Nemhauser

Begin the year by having an all-school program in which every student and teacher participates (with or without parents). The theme should represent Judaism's highest ideals: Torah Study, Spirituality, Tikkun Olam, etc. Here are two ideas that will start the new religious school year in an exciting and exemplary way:

1. As each student enters the learning space, use an instant camera to photograph the student holding a Sefer Torah. Post these pictures to an "*Ani Po* – I am present" bulletin board that displays the blessing, "*Barukh Atah Ado nai, Elo heinu Melekh ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav vitzivanu la'asok bedivrei Torah* – Blessed are You, Adonai Our God, Ruler of the Universe who sanctifies us and commands us to engage in the words of Torah."



2. Using a large cardboard box, or several pieces of tag board, design a jigsaw puzzle. Prior to cutting the puzzle, print the message, "*Kol Yisrael Areivin Zeh Bazeh* – Each Jew is Responsible for Every Jew." Use letters as large as the space will provide. Cut one piece for each class in the school and give the piece to the teacher prior to beginning of class. As students arrive in their classes, the teachers will invite them to write/print their names (where possible in Hebrew) on a puzzle piece. Teachers and aides should also write their names. Hold an opening all-school assembly and use the reconstruction of the puzzle – highlighting its message – as a way to demonstrate the important role that each student and teacher plays in the school community.

Adapted from ***The Idea Compass Book***, "The First Day of School" by Howard T. Bogot, Beatrice Feder and Ellen Nemhauser.

## FIRST DAY CHECKLIST FOR EDUCATION DIRECTORS AND PRINCIPALS

### SCHOOL'S PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

All those responsible for the school's physical environment must have a working knowledge of each of the following. Prior to the first day each must be checked to ensure that it functions.

- Heating/cooling system
- Burglar alarm system
- Fire alarm system
- Lighting
- Ventilation
- Computer, copy and fax equipment
- Windows
- Fuse boxes
- Garbage disposals and recycling units
- Doors



### SCHOOL SAFETY

- First aid supplies replenished and accessible
- Designated people with CPR and Emergency Assistance certificates
- Emergency exit instructions established and posted
- Operational PA system
- Following phone numbers posted in a visible place:
  - Ambulance (911)
  - Poison Control
  - Police Department
  - Fire Department
  - Local Water/Plumber
  - Local Electricity/Electrician
  - Bus Company
  - Weather

### TEACHER'S SPACE

- Includes a clean, accessible, and room place for the staff
- Includes food, drink, and supplies for staff and visitors
- Includes educational journals and magazines (Jewish and secular)
- Includes a sign-in sheet for teachers
- Provides teachers with individually labeled mail boxes

### SCHOOL AESTHETICS

- Bulletin boards and displays generated by school classes
- Flag of Israel
- Colorful posters

## CLASSROOM ARRANGEMENTS

- Room assignments and class lists posted in front hall
- Keys for all door cabinets
- Adequate number of desks and chairs in each classroom

## MATERIALS FOR WHOLE SCHOOL

- Tzedakah* boxes for all classes
- Lesson plan templates for all teachers
- Student texts and notebooks
- Pencils, erasers, pens, colored writing supplies, paper supplies, etc.
- Art supplies and labeled boxes
- Paper goods for snacks

## ADMINISTRATIVE CONCERNS

- Attendance lists for each teacher
- Emergency contact information for each student and teacher

## SPECIAL NEEDS

- Clear accessible routes into school and classrooms
- Alternative foods for snacks to accommodate children with allergies
- Steps under water fountains
- Safety bars in restrooms
- Large grip pencils
- Provisions for hearing and vision impaired students
- Designated areas for time out with music, books, etc.



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## COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

Barbara Mollin Lerner and Sallie D. Olson

### Involving Parents in Their Child's Jewish Education

#### Parent Involvement in Learning Activities:

- Clarify the role of parents for supporting school learning and behavior during school orientation.
- Provide information on an adult level about the subjects and ideas being discussed in the child's class.
- Provide ideas on how to help their child at home with information about age appropriate material. Many publishers now include this type of material in their teacher's guides.
- Design assignments to involve parent and child collaboration or cooperation.
- Encourage teachers to schedule assignments for parents and students over weekends and days when most parents are available.
- Encourage parents to participate in class activities and share their expertise.
- Recommend books to stimulate Jewish identity formation.



#### Parent Involvement at School as Volunteers and Supporters:

- Survey parents early in the school year to find out what skills, talents, contacts, and needs they have.
- Recognize that many parents would like to volunteer in the classroom for specific projects, in ways they can feel comfortable, and within a specified time frame, e.g., an astronomy buff who will help with a yearly *Havdalah* program.
- Schedule volunteers when they can feel valued and have time to relate to the teacher as well as other parents and students, e.g., plan time to orient parents to their class role before the class session begins.

## COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

Barbara Mollin Lerner and Sallie D. Olson



### Planning for Successful Parent-Teacher Conferences

- The teacher sets the initial climate of the meeting. It is another opportunity to open lines of communication between school and home.
- Find out if parents who live apart will want separate or joint conferences concerning their child.
- Start the conference with friendly, casual remarks, e.g., it is so nice to meet Rachel's parents.
- Begin with a positive statement about the child, e.g., Avi is very well organized.
- Always be specific. Incorporate anecdotal remarks to share information.
- Teachers need to communicate a caring for the whole child.
- Give parents time to talk and share their concerns. The teacher needs to show that he or she understands their concerns even if not agreeing with them.
- If warranted, set up additional meeting times to work on any strategy that the home and school needs to coordinate concerning the child.
- Closure is important. Review the highlights of the meeting. Maintain the announcement conference schedule. Thank parents for their participation.
- Follow up after the conference with telephone calls, notes, e-mails, and the sharing of appropriate information with congregational staff, rabbi, and cantor.

## *DIVREI TORAH* Rabbi Richard Fagan

As Jewish parents and educators, we realize that Talmud Torah is a lifetime endeavor; we never stop studying Torah. At your Shabbat table, at a faculty, PTO or Board of Education meeting, and certainly in the school itself, you may want to have a *D'var Torah* presented, by itself, or as a lead-in to discussion.

*Divrei Torah* can be on any subject, as long as it relates to Judaism. The most usual sources used are materials about a holiday or special Jewish occasion; *Pirkei Avot*, The Chapters or Ethics of the Fathers; or the *parasha*, the Torah and Haftarah section of the week.

The three basic rules of *Divrei Torah* are:

- Let it touch – *Divrei Torah* should relate some Jewish text or teaching to our daily lives.
- Make it yours – use what interpretations you find, but reflect it through your mind, your heart
- Keep it short.



Sources to look for *Divrei Torah* might include:

### Text and Commentary

- Bible or *Humash* – with commentary as you prefer . . .look at them all . . .
- ***The Torah, A Modern Commentary*** by W. Gunther Plaut. New York, NY: UAHC, 1974. (Reform)
- ***The JPS Torah Commentary*** by Nahum Sarna, Baruch Levine, Jacob Milgrom, Jeffrey Tigay. Philadelphia, PA: JPS, 1989. (Considered Conservative)
- ***The Chumash – Stone Edition***. Brooklyn, NY: Artscroll – Mesorah Publications, 1993. (Orthodox)
- ***The Soncino Chumash and the Books of the Bible***. London, England: Soncino Press.
- ***Pirkei Avot***. Many editions are available. Some are called ***Ethics of the Fathers***, some ***Chapters of the Fathers***.

### Short Teachings Based on Text (Prepared Divrei Torah)

- ***Love Your Neighbor*** by Zelig Pliskin. New York, NY: Gross Brothers, 1977.
- ***Sparks Beneath the Surface*** by Kerry Olitsky and Lawrence Kushner. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1993.
- ***Torah Gems*** by Aharon Yaakov Greenberg. Tel Aviv, Israel: Chemed Books and Co., 1992.
- ***Living Each Day*** by Abraham Twersky. Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications.
- ***Heart of Wisdom*** by Bernard Raskas. New York, NY: JTS Publications.

Stories Can Be Used or Excerpted for this Purpose Too. Try:

- ***The Classic Tales*** by Ellen Frankel. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Press, 1989.
- ***Jewish Stories One Generation Tells Another*** by Peninah Schram. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Press, 1989.

On the web, you can find links to *Divrei Torah* at <http://www.ajce.org/content/educationalResources/links/edlinks.shtml>.

You should also look at Shamash, a major consortium of Jewish sites. For *Divrei Torah* about the Torah portions, go to <http://www.shamash.com/tanach/dvar.html>. Shamash has hundreds of *Divrei Torah* with study materials from a variety of sources. Much is Orthodox in origin, but Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist materials are there too, along with Israeli, university, and other groups. Whatever the orientation of the author, you will probably find the kernel of an idea that you can use your own way. Remember to look for resources in the rest of Shamash if you haven't already done so – at <http://www.shamash.com>.



## CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

Shelley K. Rosenberg, Ed.D.

Increasingly, more and more children with special needs of all types are being included in our religious school classrooms. This is as it should be; yet it creates an additional challenge in an already challenging situation. How can teachers start off the year in a manner that will be most helpful to themselves, their children with special needs, and their “typical” classmates?

Probably the most important thing a teacher can do is develop an attitude of willingness to take on the challenge presented by the special needs child in his or her classroom. The old axiom, “Where there’s a will, there’s a way,” could not be more true in this situation. Teachers who are willing to explore interventions, accommodations, and modifications to their curriculum and classroom environment are well on the way to helping students with special needs.



Second, establishing partnerships with other members of the school team – the education director, other teachers and specialists, the rabbi and cantor – and then including the parent(s) in that team is critical. Everyone who works with the child should collaborate to set goals, plan lessons, and create innovative techniques for implementing them. Parents who are included in the team from the start are likely to be willing rather than resistant, supportive rather than defensive, and often have valuable insights to offer. Especially in the religious school environment, where schooling is elective rather than mandatory, the parents’ cooperation is essential. Unfortunately, some parents remain unwilling to discuss their child’s disability, fearing they and their child will be stigmatized in the Jewish community, which so highly prizes academic achievement. Demonstrating to them that an effective program exists, run by non-judgmental, caring people, is an important first step.

Next, it is important to identify each child who has special needs and establish the type and severity of the child’s disability. If possible, teachers should avail themselves of records from previous years. Informal testing of the child’s abilities in Hebrew will enable teachers to plan for all the children in the class, not only those with special needs. Then, the team can determine which children need interventions (such as tutoring or pull-out to a resource room), accommodations (such as teaching the content differently), or even modifications of content that is too difficult for this child. The over-riding concern should be enabling the child to acquire Judaic skills that he or she needs to participate in the Jewish community.

At this point the classroom teacher can look specifically to his or her classroom and plan to optimize the environment to accommodate children with special needs. The following is a list of ways to begin to think about modifying the physical space, the curriculum, and the social/emotional environment.

### Modifying the physical space:

- ◆ Sit child close to teacher, but within the group
- ◆ Decrease distractions near the child's seat, perhaps by use of a study carrel
- ◆ Color-code books, notebooks, folders, and any other materials the child will need
- ◆ Provide easy access to materials the child will need

### Modifying the curriculum and instruction:

- ◆ Give clear and concise written and oral directions for all assignments
- ◆ Give only one assignment at a time
- ◆ Provide multi-sensory materials and hands-on experiences for the child
- ◆ Modify assignments that are too difficult, too long, or too abstract
- ◆ Give extra time for tasks that are difficult; don't penalize for this
- ◆ Choose alternate forms of evaluating performance (e.g., art projects, oral reports, untimed tests)

### Modifying the social/emotional climate:



- ◆ Establish clear rules and procedures, explain and demonstrate them at the beginning of the year
- ◆ Establish and enforce clear and consistent consequences when rules are violated
- ◆ Establish a cooperative, rather than a competitive, atmosphere; encourage students to help one another
- ◆ Reward more than penalize; encourage at every opportunity

There are many more accommodations that are specific to an individual child's disability and abilities. Teachers who find themselves working with children with special needs can find additional help from the Special Needs Consultant at the Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education.

