




NEWSLETTER

Akiba Schechter

JEWISH DAY SCHOOL

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חסד service

Mrs. Crook's 7th/8th grade Tefillah group embarked on a Chesed project after they learned about children with Down Syndrome from one of their classmates. They decided to make stuffed toys that offer a lot of tactile stimulation to give as gifts. Finding sewing patterns and ordering free fabric swatches online, they sourced this project themselves. Then it was on to actual production, using templates



◀ Elyasheve works at the sewing machine.



▲ The final products—pretty impressive for a first-time sewing project!

(Top, insert) Izzy using her toy pig as a cat toy, Raizel sewing, Ava with her toy elephant.

to cut out fronts, backs, tails, and ears to sew stuffed animals, and learning how to operate the sewing machine. In addition to hand and machine sewing, they had to figure out the sewing directions. They also learned to anticipate what notions they needed to bring: needles, thread, scissors, bodkins or sticks to stuff the fiberfill in the legs and tails. They swapped and shared useful items and “maker” knowledge at every step. All together it was a collaborative as well as a charitable undertaking, and the students surprised themselves with how successful they were.



▲ Kol Hakavod (Congratulations) to Mrs. Schinasi's Chidon HaTanach (National Bible Contest) class: Toibeh Sarah, Aaron, Yaakov and Netanel. They studied tirelessly, giving up many a lunch hour, and they all qualified to compete in the National Finals in New York in early May. Mazal tov to Yaakov, who placed 7th in the 6th/7th grade division!

Mrs. Leonard's 3rd/4th graders read biographies of famous people and created these amazing bottles to represent the person they studied. These bottles represent (left to right): Paul Revere (by Ari), Walt Disney (by Ike), Abigail Adams (by Maayan), Charlie Chaplin (by Coby), Louisa May Alcott (by Solje), Betsy Ross (behind with the orange hair) (by Megill), Lou Gehrig (by Asher), Eleanor Roosevelt (by Sami), Chuck Jones (by Ilan).



VALUING JEWISH EDUCATION

BY DR. ELIEZER JONES

In early 1900s America, Jewish day schools were founded to create bastions of Torah learning and Jewish values. As the movement grew, the focus expanded to include academic excellence in both Judaic and General Studies. Jewish day schools like Akiba became academic powerhouses, competing with the best private schools.

While Jewish values remain the foundation of who we are, we need to be a hub of creativity and innovation to secure our children's future in this rapidly changing world. We remain committed to truly nurture and unlock every child's inner strengths, so that they are best prepared for the modern world with a confident and positive sense of self, a love for learning and a commitment to Judaism.

This year, as your new head of school, I worked with the admin team to begin building a strong foundation for the future on an already strong foundation. We started by developing our own **Research and Development**

Department to have a system that ensures that new programs, models and ideas are thoughtfully studied, implemented and sustained. We have also been planning and designing our own **makerspace** that will be built this summer and ready for our students in the fall. We have been planning a new after-school program that will integrate Jewish learning and technology that we hope to launch next spring. Above all, we have been supporting all our teachers, staff and students who have new and fantastic ideas for engaging and meaningful learning. And these plans are just the tip of the iceberg.



Of course, none of this is possible without the proper support and investment from our families and friends. That is why this year we worked with development consultants to create a systemic approach to fundraising and development. The goal was to put into place the structure and support system needed for a new Director of Development to be successful. This process has led us to raise more

funds than last year, add a new donor appreciation event (**the '72 Society**), hire support for development, and create a development model that will sustain us well into the future.

At Akiba-Schechter the value of Jewish education is clear. We appreciate all our families, donors, and organizations who support us. **Thank you for investing in our school. Thank you for investing in the future.**



▲ Dr. Jones filming our Rosh Hashana video with the Blue Room kids at the Hyde Park Farmers Market

#ILLUMINATEAKIBA



▲ Our Spread-the-Light event featured all kinds of light-focused, Chanukah-themed activities for families to engage in, such as the dreidel mural or creating wax hands.

PRESCHOOL FOUNDER BARBARA SIMON REFLECTS ON 30+ YEARS OF TEACHING



**“Don’t take yourself too seriously.
Take what you do seriously.”**

▲ Barbara in the Purple Room, reading books to the children that they wrote themselves.

Never one to take herself too seriously, if you ask Barbara Simon when she started the preschool at Akiba, she says, “Millie would know.” It was, for sure, in the early ‘80s. The Purple Room, synonymous with Barbara these days, was her original room. Hailing from Detroit, Barbara began teaching preschool at the Hyde Park Union Church when her husband Skeeter’s career as an orthopedic surgeon brought them to the University of Chicago. Soon enough, parents involved at Akiba-Schechter and Rodfei Zedek (housed, at the time, in the same building) asked whether she’d be willing to start a preschool there. The rest is history.

“We began with 12 kids and two teachers.” While the preschool has grown a lot, it hasn’t changed much according to Barbara. “We always had good people, and the Hyde Park families are really amazing and central to the preschool.” She loves running into former students’ families around Hyde Park, and she’s thrilled that, in some cases, she’s been privileged to teach the children of former Purple Room kids as well as her own grandchildren.

Barbara hired Carla Goldberg after observing her playing kickball with 1st grade students and was eventually happy to hand over the administrative reigns. “Teaching in the Purple Room in the morning was just ideal for me,” she says. She continued mentoring younger teachers. One of Barbara’s classic one-liners as a mentor: “Do you want to do this your way or the right way?” Often, she would step back and let a younger teacher try something, but, she says, “We’d always talk about it afterwards and discuss what worked and what didn’t.”

Needless to say, Barbara loves teaching three-year-olds. “It’s a great age, just right.” Even though Barbara is a veteran teacher, she says, “I still got nervous every fall when the new class came in. By the end of the school year, we teachers have fallen in love with the kids. It pleases me that even after so many years, it remains fresh for me.”

Barbara still likes to shake things up now and then. Carmel, the Purple Room’s pet guinea pig, was her idea and met with some initial skepticism. “Now she’s everybody’s pet!”



▲ 1984: Can you find Barbara?
(*See solution on bottom of page 6)

Barbara has inspired so many in the Akiba community to run! Join us for our annual fundraising event, honoring her, a run and brunch (bRUNch) on June 24. RSVP and/or contribute at akibaschechter.org/runandbrunch



YELLOW ROOM BAKERY

The Yellow Room kids embarked on an in-depth bakery study this spring. They began by visiting local bakeries to research what makes a bakery: not only baked goods, but display cases, food packaging, signage, as well as nice places for patrons to sit. Grouped in teams, they took on different jobs and diligently worked towards opening their very own bakery. The contractors were in charge of the trays for the bakery's food and figured out the arrangement of the counter and seating by making blueprints. The signage team created food labels and signs for the bakery. The bakers decided on the final menu, wrote the recipes and figured out what ingredients were needed for the bakery's offerings:

- Tuna Sandwich
- Chocolate Croissant
- Coffee, Hot Chocolate, & Water
- The Yellow Room Special: Orange Cake with Chocolate Frosting

A project like this fosters social and emotional development as children shared, took turns and followed directions. It required them to reason and problem solve. As they used measuring spoons, counted scoops, followed a recipe's order, sorted ingredients, and designed the display space, they acquired pre-math skills. Creating the bakery also laid the foundation for literacy as kids needed to read labels on ingredients, deciphered

recipes, looked through cookbooks and wrote down their recipes. Stirring, pinching, scooping, kneading, and cutting developed their fine motor skills.

On May 4, the children hosted their Grand Bakery Opening—a wonderful opportunity for them to share their creation with families and other classes.



YELLOW ROOM SPECIAL: Orange Cake with Chocolate Buttercream

For the Cake:*

2 cups all-purpose flour	½ cup orange juice
½ teaspoon salt	½ cup vegetable oil
3 teaspoons baking powder	3 eggs, beaten
1½ cups superfine sugar	1½ teaspoons grated orange zest
½ cup milk	

Preheat oven to 350° F. Grease and flour two 8-inch round cake pans. In a measuring cup, combine milk, orange juice, oil, beaten eggs, and orange zest. Set aside. Sift flour, salt and baking powder into a large bowl. Mix in sugar. Make a well in the center and pour in the milk mixture. Stir until thoroughly combined. Divide batter into prepared pans. Bake in the preheated oven for 35 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean. Allow to cool.

For the Frosting:**

2 cups (4 sticks) unsalted butter, room temperature
12 ounces semisweet chocolate, melted and cooled
3 tablespoons milk
1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
5 cups confectioners' sugar

To make the frosting: Beat butter until smooth and creamy, 2 to 3 minutes in electric mixer. With mixer on low speed, add chocolate until just combined. Add milk, vanilla, and sugar; mix on medium until well combined, being careful not to overmix.

*Cake recipe from Allrecipes.com **Frosting recipe from MarthaStewart.com





IT'S OK, BENEFICIAL EVEN, TO TAKE KIDS TO A FUNERAL

by Miriam Kass, Principal

After learning of our beloved school matriarch Millie Miller's death, I took a deep breath while hundreds of Millie-moments crossed my mind and my eyes teared up, and then I told her son Glenn, "We will be there."

By that I meant that we, as a school, would take all the middle school students who wanted to come to the funeral of the most remarkable person at Akiba: 96-year-old Millie, who had been the school's secretary for almost 50 years. The week before she died, Millie had still helped to serve lunch. Mind you, until her death, none of us had known exactly how old she was. That was Millie: old fashioned, dignified and not afraid to give you a piece of her mind.

Millie was a second Bubbe (grandmother) to generations of Akiba students, and so I knew we needed to sit with the rest of her family at her funeral. We would give the children the chance to say good-bye, to pay their respects and to honor Millie.

After learning they could go to the funeral, students asked beautiful questions: "What do I wear to be most respectful?"—"Will people be



▲ *Millie as we will always remember her: Answering the phone at her desk in the preschool (September 2016)*

crying?"—"Is it ok to feel a little happy that you think I'm old enough to go?"—"Will children be allowed to speak?"—"Can you tell us what to expect because I want to go, but I'm a bit scared?" This affirmed to me that attending a funeral was also a teaching moment, an opportunity to involve the kids in all aspects of life, even the sad ones. Helping them through this one and exposing them to the ritual would provide them with a frame of reference for when they have to attend a funeral that might hit closer to home.

Sitting among them at the funeral, I felt sadness for our collective loss and gratitude for the many years we had with Millie (over 41 for me!) and for all the ways she left her mark on our lives. But I was also filled with Nachas (pride and joy). At the funeral, our students listened intently. Some were moved to tears; others smiled and even laughed at some of the amusing memories shared. Most importantly, they rose to the occasion and offered comfort and support to Millie's family, and they learned, some for the very first time, how we say goodbye.

AKIBA IS LIKE ISRAEL

Q&A

with Akiba's "First Family"—Israeli Consul General Aviv & Einat Ezra, whose children have been attending Akiba since 2016

Why did you choose Akiba as the Chicago school for your children?

When we received the posting to Chicago, we knew immediately that if there was an option to send our kids to a Jewish school, that would be our choice. Unlike other places we have been posted, like Egypt where there is no Jewish school, there were so many options in Chicago. It was a hard decision to make since all the schools were amazing. However, at Akiba we found a philosophy and a way of teaching that was a good fit. We found Akiba to be like Israel in terms of pluralism: modern orthodox, secular, reform, and in preschool even non-Jews are all studying in the same class. This was something we knew we wanted our kids to experience. We also appreciate the differentiation in Akiba's Hebrew program that enables our kids to study at a level that will ease their reentry into the Israeli school system.

How is life in Chicago different from the places you've lived before?

In Egypt, we didn't get to use our snow boots very much, so luckily, we're making good use of them in Chicago! When we lived in Egypt, the Jewish community was

around 100 people. There was no Jewish school, and the few historical synagogues there were closed so it was very difficult to practice Judaism. Moving to Atlanta, Washington, DC, and then Chicago, we felt like we were with our Jewish family.

What have you found in the Chicago community that has surprised you?

Although the weather is cold in Chicago, the community fosters such a warm environment that we even fell in love with winter. Chicago is a beautiful city with world-renowned architecture, a vibrant culture and a thriving Jewish presence in so many aspects (including Zionism). It makes us proud to represent Israel in the Midwest. We also learned that the Midwest actually has some pretty good falafel and shwarma if you know where to look!

What do you hope your children will take with them from their experience of living in Chicago? And attending Akiba?

For our kids growing up in Israel, Judaism was a default; in America, one's Judaism has to be more intentional. At Akiba our kids were able to witness and experience



an environment where kids from all different streams of Judaism can feel comfortable. We've seen this diversity firsthand in our daughter's class where girls from different Jewish backgrounds are friends.



▲ Kol Hakavod to Dena Lebowitz (Akiba class of '13) and Leah Basa ('12) who, in May, graduated from their military training together. What an amazing thing to have two Akiba alumnae serving in the same unit in the IDF!

◀ When G-d gives you a canvas, you draw on it. The Kindergarten made good use of the snow fall during the week of Yom HaAtzmaut.





THE MANY FIRSTS OF OUR GIRLS BASKETBALL TEAM

by Joe Esse, Coach

“What’s traveling?” someone asked during our first basketball practice. Clearly, we were starting at the ground level, which came as no surprise as this was the first ever practice for the Akiba-Schechter’s girls basketball team.

None of the girls had ever been on a basketball team, and many hadn’t been on any team in any sport!

What happened next was incredible.

The girls practiced three times a week and quickly picked up the basics of basketball. Before long they were dribbling, passing, shooting, and playing tenacious defense. They learned a couple plays and prepared for their first game. Their inexperience showed in that first game—they were unsure what to do after the opposing team had scored a basket.

By the end of the season, however, the girls were setting picks, passing the ball around the court, running multiple defensive concepts and working as a cohesive unit. Eighth-graders Aliza and Basya took on leadership roles, organizing the team and helping



the other players learn and grow. Seventh-grader Toibeh Sarah played a vital role creating the team by actively recruiting and securing commitments from the majority of the girls who ended up forming the squad.

Other team members included Merav (7th), Anna (6th), Verdit (6th), Lilah (6th), Ronit (5th), and Aviya (5th). It was a very successful season, and I am looking forward to future seasons of coaching these incredible girls and the future players that they have inspired.