LEARNING NEVER STOPS AT HILLEL

DIVREI Hillel
summer 2020 | יַפ 5780
a look at the 2019-2020 school year

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I am happy to be writing this welcome message as Hillel’s new Head of School. Since being offered the position in early December, I have been excitedly preparing for my move to Detroit. None of us could have predicted back then that the world would be thrown into a global pandemic, with stay-at-home orders this past March, followed by a switch to a full remote learning program for Hillel students.

As an optimist, I always try to find the silver lining in any situation. Despite the physical distance from each other that we experienced, the COVID-19 pandemic provided me the opportunity to connect with Board members, administrators, staff, and parents much earlier than originally anticipated via numerous Zoom meetings. This allowed me to meet, ask questions, listen, and learn (one of my major goals for my first year) in a deep and meaningful way. I have been heartened by the support of the Board of Trustees and their love and passion for Hillel. Our faculty, staff, and Leadership Team went above and beyond each day to deliver a remote learning program that provided academic continuity, time for meaningful social connection for Hillel students, and opportunities to continue their Jewish development. I am also grateful for the support of Hillel parents who juggled personal and professional responsibilities each day with resolve, grace, and a sense of humor.

This issue of Divrei Hillel celebrates the many achievements of the 2019 - 2020 school year, both in-person and during our remote learning period, covering our strong secular and Judaic academic programs, alumni news, innovative school initiatives, and community events. As you read the articles, you will find that Hillel remains a warm, supportive, and happy community, and as committed today as ever to its essential purpose: educating children to be inspired by and devoted to Jewish living. Please spread the word about our amazing school to all who will listen. The more Jewish children we can educate, the better the prospects for a vibrant, engaged, world-class Detroit Jewish community for generations to come.

Despite the uncertainties that we all face in the coming months, the words of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, strengthen my faith as a Jew and my hope for the promise of the coming school year: “Faith is not about optimism but about courage, the courage to face an unknown future knowing that we are not alone, that God is with us, lifting us when we fall, signaling the way.” As a Hillel community, we will hold firm to our mission and core Jewish values, and continue providing an outstanding education for our children.

I am hopeful that we will be able to meet in person in the weeks and months to come. In the meantime, I welcome your phone calls, emails, and invitations to coffee. Above all else, I look forward to a wonderful school year.

Happy Reading!

Sincerely,

Dr. Darin S. Katz
Head of School
Hillel Plans for In-Person Learning in the Fall

As long as Michigan is in Phase 4 or 5 of reopening by early September, in-person learning will be a real possibility. Hillel’s Leadership Team, reopening task forces, and medical advisors have been digesting every requirement and recommendation outlined in Governor Gretchen Whitmer’s plan, and our staff is communicating regularly regarding health and safety protocols and necessary class and afterschool activity modifications.

As we prepare for a return to campus, we are also focusing on Fall academic plans and strategic priorities. Based on parent input from our fall 2019 survey and as part of our continuous improvement efforts, we have established a set of non-negotiables in each grade for grammar and spelling that promotes attention to detail and sets high expectations for written work. We are also offering more rigorous math in seventh grade, and have reintroduced phonics (see next page). Additionally, we are in the midst of a Hebrew curriculum audit led by Vardit Ringvald, the Director of the School of Hebrew at Middlebury College. We look forward to recommendations to improve Hillel’s Hebrew Curriculum to ensure that all Hillel graduates become proficient speakers and writers of the Hebrew language.

This past school year also saw a renewed emphasis on Tefillah as a critically important pathway into many key aspects of Jewish living. We piloted Tefillah rotations in the 5-6 community to give students the opportunity to connect Tefillah to our core values, build skills as a prayer leader, and explore its meaning. Next year, Tefillah rotations will expand into 7th and 8th grade to continue building our student’s confidence as leaders, and to help them find meaning in prayer. Sample Tefillah rotations from the 2019-2020 academic year include: an Attitude of Gratitude, Torah Reading Skills, Tefillah Gear, and Growing in Tefillah: A Greenhouse Experience.

Over the summer, we are offering weeklong summer classes via Zoom so that students can stay active and engaged in learning, as well as fun summer activities virtually with teachers and Jewish camps to keep our community connections strong.

Please stay up to date with the latest reopening news at hillelday.org/discover/campus-reopening-plan.

PHONICS PROFESSORS

BY JULIE TIGAY, K-4 LANGUAGE ARTS COORDINATOR, 1-2 GENERAL STUDIES TEACHER

This past year at Hillel, K-2 General Studies educators embarked on new ways of teaching phonics. Phonics Workshop, designed by Lucy Caulkins, whose Writers’ and Readers’ Workshops have been in place for years at Hillel, develops literacy through correlating sounds with letters. Through the introduction of Phonics Workshop, students became “Phonics Professors,” and learned to tackle words to emerge as readers and writers.

In each grade, “professor-students” were assisted by a phonics mascot to help them fall in love with literacy. Together, they created a joyful community of learners. Kindergartners were b Showers to guide them; and second grade had Gus to present them with challenges.

The Phonics Workshop is a framework for tackling the challenging task of enabling students to read and write at their highest potential. It also offers teachers the opportunity to teach students in a concise way, and provides a pathway for strengthening their skills in a realistic way.

Workshops tap into kids’ skills, and bring out their positive energy. The curriculum unfolds in an engaging, story-like manner, with each new lesson picking up where the previous one left off. The lessons are fun to teach, but the real fun is to see the lessons transfer directly into the students’ reading and writing.

This past school year also saw a renewed emphasis on phonics as an astoundingly critical component of literacy instruction. Our students were able to tackle words in both their reading and writing.

The growth our students made in a short time using this approach was jaw-dropping. The conversations I was able to have with my students about why words are spelled the way they are was nothing i ever expected of a second grader. Listening to students talk about words and their approach to the spelling of a word was astounding. Our students were able to tackle words in both their reading and writing because they had new found phonemic awareness. The way they started speaking about words and using Phonics Professor terminology was impressive!

New Seventh Grade Class Further Foundations in Math

In the Fall, a new seventh grade math course will provide more rigorous opportunities for students who are ready to engage deeply with concepts they understand, in preparation for algebraic thinking.

Seventh Grade Math Extensions offers a middle ground between Seventh Grade Math, which builds upon the sixth grade curriculum, and Algebra for those students who are ready for higher math. Students will be placed in the class based on achievement, and “ready to engage in appropriate discourse,” said Michelle Bortnick, 5-8 Math Curriculum Coordinator.

“At Hillel,” she explained, “we look at the whole child. If they are going to be ready for Algebra in eighth grade, we want to provide an entry point for them in seventh grade. It’s another way for us to differentiate in a focused way, to meet every child where they need to be.”

Barbara Applebaum, our 5-8 Learning Communities Director, concurred. “We are always reflecting on our curriculum, and making sure we have the right opportunities to both challenge and support students. Michelle and the math team go above and beyond to create and implement new classes and curriculum.”

“The overall goal,” Mrs. Bortnick said, “is for students at any level to foster a growth mindset, where they take risks, and learn from mistakes. In math, appropriate placement will ultimately help a child gain a solid mathematical foundation, which will enable them to be successful in later courses.”
SCIENCE & THE "Cs" ARE BETTER TOGETHER

MICROSCOPES ARE KEY IN SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION, SO WE ASKED OUR TEACHERS TO VIEW SOME OF THE CORE SKILLS OF A HILLEL EDUCATION THROUGH THE LENS OF SCIENCE!

COMMUNITY: In fourth grade science, the community starts at the door, with a greeting, followed by circle time, where students share stories that provide insights into their unique capabilities, and we review expectations to provide a sense of security as we embark on a lab. These routines create a safe space in which students can discover the world around them and learn. Connecting scientific knowledge to their previous life experiences strengthens their curiosity for the world around them, and deepens their understanding. By creating an active community of scientists, we are able to work together in a predictable environment to discover and celebrate the outcomes of our investigative learning.
— Jamie Blank, 4th Grade Science Teacher

CRITICAL THINKING: Critical thinking, particularly in science, involves observation, interpretation, analysis, reflection, evaluation, and explanation. Project-based learning shows that the skills of critical thinking can be taught. In fifth-grade science, students are given the opportunity in groups of 3 or 4 to practice the necessary skills of a critical thinker. One such example is when students use their observation skills to identify the physical properties of their chosen cookie in the Fifth Grade Cookie Bake-Off. Students analyze the taste, texture, smell, and appearance of their cookie, and write a slogan that best interprets those qualities in a catchy phrase. Students evaluate their classmates’ slogans by sampling their cookies, and reflecting upon the words used to describe the taste, texture, smell, and appearance. Explanations are provided to their classmates as to the validity of their chosen words. Students also practice their critical thinking skills in creating a lesson for their classmates on the human body systems, building and programming Lego Wedo robots to meet building and programming challenge requirements, and designing and building mini-golf holes to meet forces and motion concepts that will impact the movement of the ball on the hole. The development and use of critical thinking in Hillil students are necessary for discussion, decision-making, and problem-solving, not only in science, but in life.
— Amy Piesz, 5th Grade Science Teacher

CHARACTER: Our guiding question in sixth grade was, “How do we work productively in groups?” The answer hinged on performance tasks designed for sixth grade scientists by Stanford University. Students were challenged to do their own work, pay attention to what others need, and learn that no one is done until everyone is done. In short, they were each practicing being a MENSCH.

In the final task, we used claim, evidence, and reasoning to determine whether humans can safely explore Mars, aided by a trip to the Michigan Science Center’s Space Exploration Exhibit. Whether they concluded that humans can, or cannot, safely visit Mars, their character-building work in the classroom had paid off. During our visit, students demonstrated kindness and self-awareness as they interacted with the hands-on exhibits, other visitors, and museum staff. They understood that they are part of a larger community, and each day they work to become a better person. As a new Hillil faculty member, I was duly impressed.
— Mindy Silvey, 6th Grade Science Teacher

COMMUNICATION: The need for clear, accurate, and concise information has become especially vital and exceeded in new ways amidst our struggle to understand Covid-19. We see firsthand the importance of disseminating valid scientific information, and how hard it can be to explain scientific concepts without relying on technical jargon. Within the seventh grade science classroom, students are guided to seek out multiple, credible sources. This includes websites and individuals who can help them learn more and address their queries with specific and factual information. Students practiced crafting messages that are clear and precise in order to apply the Scientific Method after using prism goggles in the Altered Reality lab. It became comically obvious that while many students thought they were explaining their processes well enough for another student to replicate their experiment, the results often fell short of this objective.
During the Battle for Planet Earth, a project-based study of cells, oral communication skills were integrated to defend their ideas and explorations to a panel of experts. Students encountered the effect of focused eye contact, controlled body language, impact of voice, and the need for worthwhile visual aids. Students also created case studies after researching communicable diseases. They infused creativity into their communication as they positioned their case study from the perspective of a patient, doctor, journalist, or cartoonist. On any given day, students experienced several different “talk formats,” which enabled them to discuss their learning; whole-class discussions provided a forum in which there were many opportunities for the cross-pollination of ideas. Small-group formats created a safer environment in which more students had a chance to add to the conversation. Lastly, Partner Talks gave learners an even more secure space to share ideas, and rehearse what they might report in a whole-class setting. There is some type of configuration for everyone!
— Leslie Baron, 7th Grade Science Teacher

CREATIVITY: Many researchers, educators and authors would argue that creativity is paramount in any career that our students will pursue in their futures. So what does it look like in a school setting? Sir Ken Robinson, a well-known educational reform author, puts it well: “Creativity isn’t just about coming up with new ideas; some ideas might be completely crazy and impractical. So an essential bit of every creative process is evaluation.”

We believe that every student has the ability to evaluate as they conduct experiments. A great example from the eighth grade comes when students are placed into small groups of 3-4 and are tasked with building a Rube Goldberg machine, in which they must utilize everyday ordinary objects in often unusual and thoughtful ways, to perform a simple task in a complex manner. This experiential learning opportunity forces students to think in a very creative way, to evaluate as they go replacing one material for another, until they succeed. The process itself increases creativity and sets them up for success in high school.
— David Venning, 8th Grade Science Teacher
Following a festive grand opening ceremony in August, our newly expanded and renovated Early Childhood Center opened with 175 children ages 2-5 exploring playscapes, a right-sized working kitchen, and classrooms filled with natural light, each one an empty canvas waiting to be filled with artwork, findings from the natural world, and carpets, toys, lighting, and books that evoke a sense of home. The physical environment aligns with the Reggio Emilia philosophy in which faculty have newly immersed themselves, one that emphasizes an environment that gives children confidence to explore, drive their own activities, and foster their curiosity.

Peeking into classrooms, you’d find children digging inside pumpkins to count seeds and experience texture, learning their colors as they transformed their learning spaces into farms awash in yellow ducks, green vegetables, and red barns, taking turns on the monkey bars, and enjoying music and gym time, as well as Kabbalat Shabbat on Fridays, and Havdalah on Monday mornings in the mercaz, their sweet voices filling the school with love.

Our ECC 4-year-olds even undertook a social action project, selling handmade bookmarks to benefit WIRES, an Australian wildlife rescue and rehabilitation organization, following devastating wildfires in Australia. The class raised $638, proving that “even little people can make the world a better place,” teacher Helayne Shaw said.

Robin Pappas, Director of Early Education, is proud of the program, now in its 10th year of existence, and with most of the original staff intact. “Our program builds confidence in young children, and allows them to be inquisitive. They are also integrated into the larger school community from the start,” she said. “When you offer high-quality programming, it serves a purpose and fills a niche that young families are looking for.”

The expansion and renovation of the ECC was made possible by two transformative gifts from the Samuel and Jean Frankel Jewish Heritage Foundation and the William Davidson Foundation.

Establishing lifelong learning in our youngest children continued even as we moved education online during the pandemic. Each week, in addition to Zoom classes with their teachers, activities were delivered digitally to keep children working on handwriting, building number sense, learning Hebrew, and preparing for the Jewish holidays.

Our ECC 10-Year Reunion in November brought students and teachers together again. It was heartwarming to see many alumni back at school, a sign of how strong the connections remain for students long after their encounters with their very first teachers. Everyone enjoyed ECC-themed crafts, and a sing-a-long, and past students added memorabilia to our time capsule. Of course, they couldn’t leave without a Hershey kiss Shabbat treat from Robin Pappas, Director of Early Education. Here’s to the next 10 years!
SHABBAT MISPACHOT CREATE STRONG CONNECTIONS
BY RABBI DAVID FAIN, RAV BEIT HA'SEFER

This year we introduced a new initiative called Shabbat Mispacha (Shabbat family) to meet two objectives - to increase Kedushah (holiness), one of our core Jewish values, leading into Shabbat, and to strengthen social connections among our students. Groups of students in Kindergarten through eighth grade met weekly, guided by two teachers, to build connections with one another through group activities such as creating Chanukkah cards for Jews serving in the armed forces, or a Purim comic book megillah. Each Friday morning gathering also included a discussion starter to strengthen listening skills that would prove helpful later in the hour during challenges and games. Most activities ran so that every student had an opportunity to lead, share, and communicate with peers.

Strong friendships emerged. Older students picked up their younger buddies from their classrooms, and held their hands in the hallways, younger students sat on the laps of the older children, and everyone learned about the weekly Torah portion, sang kiddush, and enjoyed challah together. “The goal was for students to befriend students in other learning communities, and I loved getting to know the younger kids in my mishpacha,” Talia Colton, a fifth grader, said.

Through observation and the feedback we received from students, teachers, and parents alike, it was a resounding success. Moreover, the feeling of holiness was palpable to all. Looking towards next year, the program will adapt to meet public health guidelines. However, we are committed to again creating the core experience, to celebrate Shabbat, and our Hillel family.

PUTTING THE POP INTO SHABBAT!
BY LEAH GAWEL AND ALLISON GUTMAN, JUDAIC STUDIES TEACHERS

In the Spring of 2019, we met with Rabbi David Fain, Rav Beit Hasefer, to discuss our application for a Legacy Heritage professional development fellowship. Our aim was to breathe life into a big idea: making Fridays at Hillel special through the creation of a weekly program that would build excitement and anticipation for Shabbat.

We were accepted to the program, and embarked on a two-week journey to the dorms of Hebrew University. We studied pedagogy, Talmud, TANAKH, Israeli politics, Jewish history, and project/grant development alongside teaching fellows from Jewish day schools worldwide. It was there that we devised Shapop!, a weekly, interactive Shabbat preparatory experience during the students’ lunch hour. Inspired by the trends in “pop-ups,” we set up a station outside the miznon, where students could stop by for quick and engaging activities that revolved around the weekly Torah portion, with discussion starters for the Shabbat table.

We launched full throttle, reaching 160 children our first week. Thereafter, first through eighth graders thronged our tables every Friday during recess to braid challah, write poetry, make crafts, build Lego models, reenact scenes from the Torah on the green screen, record videos, explore biblical nature, and play games that helped instill a love of Shabbat and Torah. Shapop! ran for 16 weeks, drawing on average more than 120 students each Friday to engage in some Shabbat fun.

While the final community event and the Legacy Heritage Teacher Institute’s May 2020 symposium had to be cancelled due to Covid-19, Shapop! fun and learning will continue in the 2020-2021 school year with some “greatest hits” and plenty of new and exciting activities to continue to make Fridays special and exciting at Hillel Day School.
THIRD GRADE PILOTS NEW TORAH CURRICULUM
BY AMIRA SOLEIMANI, DIRECTOR OF JUDAIC STUDIES AND CURRICULUM

Hebrew text study is critical to connecting us to our Jewish heritage, helping students attain a level of Hebrew proficiency that allows them to actively participate in Jewish life. This year, our third grade piloted a brand new, differentiated Torah curriculum that I created, with guidance from Principal Melissa Michaelson. This curriculum, the Tanach Sadna, aims to teach literary-based biblical Hebrew skills while promoting a deep love of Torah.

Using a student-focused workshop structure, drawing upon best practices from our General Studies reading curriculum, the Sadna curriculum contains embedded differentiated instruction to meet individual needs, and offers balanced opportunities for text-based choice reading. The Tanach Sadna avoids tedious comprehension questions and large vocabulary lists that sometimes rob children of their innate curiosity.

Each unit of study corresponds to a particular parasha, and students initially engage with this unit exclusively in Hebrew in order to acquire a particular decoding skill such as root identification. Thereafter, students select a version of the same Torah text that best matches their Hebrew reading level, just as they would an English language text, allowing for literary analysis and the acquisition of universal reading strategies at their level.

By engaging in a “just right” test for themselves, “students are able to better understand and critically think about the events in the Torah, such as the dilemmas in Avraham’s life, and relate them to their own experiences,” ensuring that the Torah remains a living source of inspiration for the Jewish people, said 3-4 Judaic Studies teacher Niva Amiel-Wilner.

Toward the end of each unit, students choose between a variety of readings from the parasha; one child could choose to read God’s covenant with Avraham in Brit Bein HaBetarim or the covenant with entry to the Jewish people in Genesis 17. Then, as in General Studies, they come back and share their insights with one another. As students progress, the biblical Hebrew and General Studies skills increasingly help students become natives in the world of biblical Hebrew Torah study.

WOWING STUDENTS WITH TRICKS FOR WELLNESS

Stress and worry in a child may seem contrary to the notion of childhood as a joyful, innocent stage of life, but it is normal to have unpleasant feelings at any age. It is important for children to understand their feelings, and to work through them in a supportive environment. This message is of great importance at Hillel, and we bring developmentally-appropriate programs to our students on this topic, such as when Anthony Grupido, a mental health magician, performed for our third and fourth graders.

"Just as with a card trick where he had no control over the outcome, he said, "It’s okay to ask for help to get out of certain situations." Rather than resorting to anger or making poor choices, take a deep breath, and choose your actions carefully. "If you’re feeling anxious, it’s part of being human. There are many people in the school you can talk to.

"Acting out is not empowering – what is empowering is making sure to not be in that situation again, or preventing another person from being in the same situation," he added. With a flourish, he emerged from a straitjacket and chains, to oohs and ahhs. "Remember - if you’re in a bind, just the way you got in, you can get out – step by step.”

Kim Love, Director of Student Services, said the program met Hillel’s objective of normalizing the conversation around emotions through engaging mental health programming in a place where students feel safe. “It is crucial to destigmatize the notion that stress and worry means something is wrong with you. The younger our students internalize the message that feeling emotions is normal, the better they are equipped to address mental health issues as they grow.”

As classes moved online during the pandemic, school social workers and learning specialists continued to offer support through a wide array of services including small group meetings. Weekly virtual lessons in social worker Harrison Leibow’s “Lounge,” for example, reminded students of their abilities to rise above the uncertainty, drawing upon their “superpower” and mensch qualities, and to adopt an attitude of gratitude despite the loss of routine, time with extended family, and beloved after-school activities. Support staff across all grades helped students to manage their time and assignments, and intervened where necessary to ensure all students stayed on track to not only endure the pandemic, but to thrive.
Thanks to our 1:1 technology program that puts a device in every student's hands, 5-8 students continued live classes with teachers every day. Social-emotional learning continued apace as well, as did advisory for 5-8 grades. Social workers and learning specialists continued to run small groups for differentiated learning, and to check-in and check-out with students as needed, intervening when necessary to make sure every student thrived during this period.

Output remained at a high level. First graders held a virtual Poetry Slam; second graders shared Slice of Life short stories; and third graders exhibited historical and iconic figures in their wax museum. Fourth graders shared their Wolverine State learning during a Discover Michigan program; sixth graders presented Shark Tank inventions, and wrote essays analyzing song lyrics as a form of poetry; and eighth graders completed Yom Hashoah memory slides, finished the yearbook, and with grit and determination despite suffering the loss of their Israel trip, nonetheless ended their year on a high note and ready for high school.

For all students, the foundation has been laid for next year, and students are ready to progress. “Of course, we missed socializing with the kids, and everyone wants to go back to school, but we’ve made the most of an imperfect world,” Morah Poris said. Socially distanced surprise drive-bys and summer send-off parades brought smiles - and tears - as the year concluded.

An upside to the learning at home was that parents, privy to the classroom in ways they are usually not, became more involved in their child’s education. Morah Poris regards that as a positive outcome of remote learning. “Parents are more aware of their children’s abilities and taking an active part, and the kids are benefiting from that. That’s one thing I hope will continue when we go back to school!”

Forecast is now part of the world’s vernacular, and Hillel made good use of the tool for gatherings to keep our community connected. Each day began with morning announcements just as we have in school, tefillot, and on Monday mornings, we met for ECC Havdalah. On Friday evenings, we gathered for themed Shabbat candle lightings to celebrate first responders, grandparents, and the Class of 2020. Tuesday evenings brought storytime and bedtime shema, and Thursdays saw the resumption of our Parsha Club with Rabbi Yarden Blumstein. Staff Chills brought our faculty together for occasional check-ins, too.

We also held a virtual Grandparents’ Lunch & Learn, an ECC “Moms’ Night In” a “Beauty in Quarantine” event, and a “Parenting in Isolation Happy Hour” for a discussion on coping with the challenges of parenting during the governor’s stay-at-home order.

Our community also shone during the many Yoms that follow Pesach. On Yom Hashoah, 91-year old survivor Lola Schonberger Zoomed with sixth graders to tell her story, while on Yom Hazikaron,

alumns Ari Weiss (class of 2014), serving in the IDF, sent a dispatch from Israel. On Yom Haatzmaut, the day was devoted to celebrating Israel’s 72nd birthday virtually through an array of recorded and live activities including Israeli dancing and cooking demonstrations led by teachers, an IDF workout, games and flag making. While we missed our in-school festivities, we thank our Israel Independence Day sponsors, Telemus Financial Life Management and Fischman Insurance Group, Sandy and Jim Danto, and Mira and Leopoldo Eisenberg, for their continued support so that we could “gather” to celebrate the miracle of Israel’s independence.

Over the summer, we are hosting both academic and experiential virtual programs and events to stay connected to school, our learning, and one another. And, naturally, we cannot wait to be together in person again!
Life is a series of moments. As the Book of Kohelet reminds us, there is “a season set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven” (Eccl. 3:1). These moments can shift us from joy to sorrow, from success to discouragement, or from enlightenment to disarray. They can range in the length of their appearance, the depth of their meaning, and their overall effect on our being. Everything in the world has its moment. The moment of now is COVID-19.

This pandemic has overturned our lives and forced us to adjust to a different reality. We experience human interaction, our role as consumers, our careers, and, of course, the structure of our education differently. In a snap, schools evolved from comfort and routine within a school building to its students learning from their homes, all while grappling with loss. The touch of a teacher’s hand on a shoulder; an embrace as a student entered the room, the warmth of peers singing arm-in-arm at an assembly; the excitement of the end of the year travels and celebrations— all came to a sudden halt.

Everything in life has its moment. Although unsettled from the spread of the virus and uncertainty about the future, Hillel Day School rose to the occasion and acted quickly. In record time, we transformed a typical school day into a remote learning structure. Our amazing teachers adapted swiftly, attaining new technology skills and modifying the curriculum to find the most critical benchmarks for learning. We kept the social-emotional needs of our students at the forefront, knowing that this moment in time would not be easy for most. Student support remained intact, often with one-on-one teacher and student FaceTime sessions. Beyond the virtual classroom, Hillel Day School made it a priority to maintain our feeling of community. Through celebration and heartbreak, during holidays and school routines, our community remained strong and united together.

Hillel Day School is committed to its mission whether we are inside the walls of our school or learning remotely. We care deeply about our students, our staff, and our families, and we are proud of the resilience shown by the Hillel community. We have proved that, regardless of life’s tribulations, we will endure. While life moments, such as COVID-19, can bring adversity and heartbreak, we also know those same moments can lead to opportunities for self-growth, gratitude, and simcha. We will emerge through these times stronger, equipped with even more appreciation for life and each other.

**FINDING A NEW RHYTHM**

**BY LAUREN MIDELTON, KINDERGARTEN TEACHER**

Prior to March 12, 2020, life was certainly busy, but in the best possible way. My boys, ages 7 and 5, were both full-time students and had entered the phase of being “somewhat independent.” I was happily in my 16th year of teaching, and I was confident and comfortable in my craft. My family and I had a rhythm: I had found my groove working full-time while striving also to be the best possible mother and wife that I could be.

On the evening of March 12, the phone rang with the message that school would be closed, and our lives changed in a way that I never imagined possible. Hillel’s teachers immediately unpacking what that would look like and how we could achieve a routine for students as quickly as possible. My colleagues and I banded together in a way that makes me proud. We truly were a team: utilizing each person’s strengths, problem solving through the expected “bumps,” and collaborating to roll out the best possible educational experience for our students. Together we navigated through Seesaw, our online platform, and discovered a greater comfort with technology than we initially knew. We sifted through our curriculum, carefully selecting the content we would push out, and brainstorming new ways to do so. We got creative with the materials we had at home, and adapted activities to best meet the needs of the learners in our classroom.

The academic component was in place, but what about the rest? From September to March, we had worked hard to build a classroom community: a space where each child felt emotionally and physically safe to take risks and grow. We were a “school family.” How could I recreate this remotely? How would I continue to connect with my 5- and 6-year old students in spite of the physical distance?

Through morning meetings, one-on-one FaceTime calls, community-wide programs and weekly tefillot, I strived to maintain the emotional connection and relationships that we had worked so hard to establish. I was welcomed virtually into each child’s home, receiving a personal tour of their bedroom, toys, and whatever art projects that had most recently been made. I conversed with many of their siblings and parents on these calls as well. I was able to see aspects of their lives that I would not otherwise be privy to in a traditional school setting. We connected in a new way, and in doing so, new pieces of each child were uncovered.

One of the greatest challenges for me personally was juggling my many roles. Finding the time to create content and instruction and to connect with my students, while simultaneously taking care of my own children and assisting them with their academic responsibilities was quite an undertaking. Some days were easier than others, but we did it.

So what did I take away from this whole experience? That we, as a collective whole, are stronger than we think. We go into problem-solving mode, and we adjust accordingly. I found comfort in my teammates, our supportive Leadership Team, and in the voices and smiles of my students when we connected at multiple checkpoints during the week. I know this has been looked at as a period of “survival mode” by some, but I believe that this diminishes the significance and importance of all the successes that we achieved during this time. We did it! And most days…..we did it with a smile!

Remote learning has been a way for me to be able to see my friends and has provided a sense of normalcy while stuck at home. The coronavirus hit close to home when I heard about what happened to Couch Tony. The school offered great support to students during that tough period.

In addition, I feel lucky and thankful to be in a school where the transition from classroom learning to remote learning was relatively easy. In true Hillel spirit, the school made sure that no student would be left behind. Not everyone is that lucky. I know that my friend in the public school system has had to make a lot of changes with remote learning. The upside to the quarantine is that I have appreciated nature a lot more, and I get outside more often. I feel lucky and thankful to be in a school where the ability to leave my house.

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STEAM CLASSES HELP STUDENTS MAKE ‘MESSY MEMORIES’

BY DAWN STRAITH, INNOVATION HUB COORDINATOR & EDUCATOR

Many of us never imagined working in anything other than a school, but during the pandemic teachers and students reimagined how we teach and learn! Our specialty class teachers rose to the occasion with lessons to complete at home, and offered live weekly classes so that the connection between home and school remained strong.

Whereas at school students have an endless array of tools at their disposal, at home, student imagination was guided by what they discovered in their kitchens, basements, and garages. They had to recycle, upcycle, and reinvent everyday objects for new uses. I found it to be a wonderful way to teach students how to solve everyday problems in unique and experimental ways. For instance, a student making a bubble wand during Maker Recess used the tube from inside a pen when he could not find a straw.

In Music, third and fourth graders created and played percussion instruments while crafting rhythmic patterns. Younger students explored a variety of musical genres and sang songs. In Art, teacher Lauren Cohen said she was amazed when one fourth grade student “created the most detailed large map of Michigan out of Michigan resources including sticks, stones, and leaves, inspired by a lesson about artist Andy Goldworthy.”

We even pulled off a new STEAM Day devoted to science, technology, engineering, art, and math. Students drew sea turtles, blew splats of paint to create monsters on canvas, built and tested bubble wands, and erupted volcanoes! The volcanoes created a mess, but science teacher Missy Borman emphasized that it was worth it because “messes make memories!” (Read more about Mrs. Borman in our faculty profile on p. 23)

School librarian and media specialist Dana Friedman challenged students to stack a tower of books on a single column made from paper. “Students were thinking like scientists and engineers,” she said, “wondering if different types of paper or folding techniques would have an impact on how much weight the columns could withstand.” One student made such a strong column from one piece of paper that she was able to stack more than 10 books atop, plus a full bottle of water!

During remote learning, specialty teachers focused on how they could turn a novel situation, filled with uncertainty, into a growth opportunity for students and teachers alike. Kudos to all for traversing, and truly embracing, this rare learning environment. We all look forward to reuniting this fall!
MIND AND SOUL. BETTER TOGETHER.
Accolades and Awards

STUDENT AND STAFF SHOUT OUTS - KOL HAKAVOD

THROUGHOUT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC, STAFF AND STUDENTS ALIKE GAVE OF THEMSELVES TO THE COMMUNITY, DELIVERING GROCERIES, COLLECTING DONATIONS FOR SHELTERS AND FOOD PANTRIES, CALLING ISOLATED SENIORS IN THE COMMUNITY, AND MAKING MASKS.

Third grader Maya Weingarden conducted weekly storytime on her mother’s Facebook page to provide uplift during quarantine along with tips for mental wellness. Fourth grader Aiden Burnstein got busy in the kitchen running his own bakery; fifth grader Mia Gantz launched a tie-dye business with a portion of proceeds given as tzedakah; fifth grader Benjamin Bronstein taught himself to code and created Ball Jump 3, a game available publicly on scratch.mit.edu; and fifth grader Jordan Endelman used his 3D printer, and skills he initially learned in Hillel’s MakerSpace, to make 100 ear guards for masks so they could fit more securely and comfortably, for the Sterling Heights Police and Fire Departments.

Throughout remote learning, tefillot were conducted via Zoom Tuesday through Thursday mornings, at 9:00 a.m. While participation was solid, the following students, who attended every session, deserve special recognition: fifth graders Jordan Endelman, Elyse Fleishman, Shyah Lakind, Shoshana Phillips, Platon Shub, and Shira Yamstein; and sixth graders Aidan Squarcia, Austin Squarcia, and Joe Squarcia, and Dane Zeff.

SOCIAL STUDIES AND SWEET DREAMS

Earlier this year, first graders studying the concept of community in social studies held a conversation about holiday traditions in various communities. Talk turned to those who are not able to celebrate traditions due to circumstances beyond their control. This led to an introduction to Beaumont Hospital’s Moonbeams for Sweet Dreams program, where throughout the month of December, the public is invited to shine flashlights into the windows of the children’s hospital to let patients know they are remembered during the holiday season.

First grade teachers seized upon the idea to start a new tradition with their families, and on a Sunday night in December, a large Hillel group joined the crowd assembled in front of the building to wave glow sticks and flashlights.

“It was a perfect way to spread joy to other families in our community,” teacher Elizabeth Emmer said. “Our act of kindness of shining flashlights made other children and families feel loved, as they flashed their lights back at us.”

Judaic Studies teachers Leah Gavel and Allison Gutman completed the Jewish Education Leadership program of the Legacy Heritage Fund and Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The program included study in Israel in 2019, and the introduction of a new educational initiative at school, Shapop! (p. 10).

Music teacher Andrea Trivax published two articles on Big Deal Media, on elementary music technology during COVID-19, and another on music technology in elementary education.

Longtime Social Studies teacher Josh Cutler (class of 1987) received his doctorate of education, an Ed.D., with an emphasis in teacher leadership, from Concordia University. Hillel’s 7-8 Grade Team surprised him with a congratulatory drive-by to celebrate his simcha.

Athletic Director Nicole Miller and science and math teacher Leslie Baron have been accepted to participate in SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) New Leaders Week at the National SEED Project. Since 1987, SEED has developed workplace leaders who guide their peers in conversational communities to drive personal, organizational, and societal change toward social justice. Due to the coronavirus, their cohort will begin in 2021.

Directors of Student Services Kim Love has been selected as a member of the Michigan Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), whose mission is to provide positive outcomes for all Michigan students with disabilities. The SEAC advises both the Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education and the State Board of Education.
**OTHER AWARDS AND MENTIONS**

During National Kindness Day in November, students completed acts of kindness all around school, and even beyond our doors. Our entire 1-2 Learning Community partnered again with Brilliant Detroit, which connects families in Detroit through centralized programming, to raise funds for its Thanksgiving Exchange. Every $50 raised translated into a package with all the delights needed for a Thanksgiving meal, including a turkey, and all the fixings!

Our students raised $650 to feed 13 families. In addition, they decorated grocery bags that Brilliant Detroit used to deliver groceries to each family along with handmade Thanksgiving greeting cards. “It felt good to do this mitzvah,” said second grader Sailor Schostak. “It helps other families celebrate Thanksgiving, and make their own memories.”

**FACULTY PROFILE**

Missy Borman

Students in science like to “explode things,” and K-3 science teacher Missy Borman is happy to indulge them in the name of exploration, she says. “Science evokes curiosity about the world around us. Kids are curious to conduct experiments that excite them, and that includes exploding volcanoes or setting off rockets!”

Speaking of experimentation, teaching science was something new for Mrs. Borman. Formerly a kindergarten and Language Arts teacher, Mrs. Borman took some time away from Hillel to raise her three children before returning to school this past fall. “As long as you can connect with students, you have an advantage as a teacher no matter the subject,” she said.

Coming to Hillel again, she found her fellow science teachers to be wholly supportive, and immersed in a hands-on approach to learning that helped students maintain and further their interest in whatever topic they were learning, from simple machines to environmental change.

“In third grade, we had discussions about natural resources and mining, and searched for chocolate chips inside of cookies using tweezers,” she said. “Kids remember that stuff. Really anything I or the students devised was possible, and we used the MakerSpace a lot – it’s an amazing complement to the classroom.” A second grade scavenger hunt for simple machines similarly made use of the building, as students scammed around looking for examples of pulleys, levers, planes, and screws.

Because lab equipment and the use of Hillel’s campus was integral to science, the move to remote learning in March was initially “unsettling.” Mrs. Borman said, “I didn’t have my ‘stuff.’ At first it was hard to let go of my lesson plans, but then I looked at how the general studies teachers were adapting their curriculum, and how the kids responded to digital lessons, and I found ways to give the students options to learn at home, from drawings to simple experiments they could conduct using materials found in the kitchen or garage.

“And when we added live science classes, learning really came alive, because kids could ask questions in real time, and I could see their reactions to the work we did together. That’s what I missed so much about not being in school,” Mrs. Borman said.

Mrs. Borman, who resides in Bloomfield Hills with husband Alan, and children Eve and Lucas, who attend Hillel, and older brother Oscar, can’t wait to see students again. “Last year I was meeting kids for the first time. I liked that going into this year, I will get to know them even better. And having surveyed them at the end of the year to get ideas for next year, I know just what experiments to implement – and yes, we will explode things,” she said with a laugh.

**FACULTY MILESTONES**

At the end of each school year, we honor staff for achieving milestones in their service to our school, and this year’s virtual program was no exception. Judaic Studies teacher Adina Levin was acknowledged for 36 years of dedicated service; learning specialist Carol Fridson for 25 years; and teacher Steve Jones, Head of Security Ronen Meir, teacher Lauren Partovich, and staff member Patricia Ruda for 18 years. As well, these employees were recognized for a decade of service, including several who have been with the Early Childhood Center since its inception 10 years ago. math teacher Laura Lebovic, Erica Greenberg (ECC), Principal Melissa Michaelson, Heather Moss (ECC), Director of Early Education Robin Pappas, Roberta Pinsky (ECC), Jodi Schaefer (ECC), Director of Advancement Amy Schussel, Helayne Shaw (ECC), Karen Simon (ECC), Barbara Stern (ECC), and Strategic Marketing and Special Events Coordinator Melanie Weber.
HILLEL VOWS TO “PLAY IT FORWARD” IN MEMORY OF BELOVED COACH TONY

BY GABRIELLA BURMAN, EDITOR

In April, the Hillel community was devastated by the death of beloved longtime staff member Tony Sanders, due to complications from the coronavirus. Better known as Coach Tony, he was part of the Hillel Day School community for 23 years. During that time, he helped to build athletic programs, coached countless sports teams, and instilled a love of sports - and sportsmanship - in all students. Nicole Miller, Athletic Director, said, "Tony has left his mark, touched so many lives, and will be remembered forever. He always said he had the best job because he got to play sports all day!"

At an April 19 virtual memorial gathering, more than 350 past and present members of our Hillel family paid their respects. "You could always count on him to brighten your day," said alumna student athlete Nia Kepes (class of 2016). "He always made students feel heard. He even made running drills fun. His encouragement made us do our best."

Coach Tony had a gift for treating students as players, said parent Barett Zeff (class of 1983), whose sons Luke (class of 2019) and Dane (sixth grade) played sports with Coach Tony. "After a brutal loss, he would sit with the team, knee to knee, and speak honestly. He had a deep understanding of people, how to talk to them, how to teach them."

Coach Tony's extended family took part in the memorial, and said they were heartened by the outpouring of love and concern for the family. "Hillel was a big part of Tony's life," his wife Leslie wrote in a message read by her brother, Mark Jackson.

In turn, Coach Tony was an integral piece of the fabric of Hillel. "His presence made Hillel a special place. He made sure kids were safe and looked after. He held our athletes to a high standard, and moreover, he emphasized good sportsmanship," said Alita Rossen, a long time 5-8 division head at Hillel.

"Through all of his helping, cheering, supporting, and playful antics, he created a mosaic of love," former P.E. teacher Nancy Oretti said. "In his memory, let's all 'play it forward.'"
CLASS OF 2020: AN UNFORGETTABLE END TO THE YEAR

Our Class of 2020 will be remembered for many firsts, some happier than others. They are the first class that includes inaugural Early Childhood Center students, and also the first class in 16 years that missed Hillel’s Israel trip, due to the coronavirus. A friendly bunch filled with musical talent, and well-loved by teachers, the class exhibited grit and determination to finish the year on a high note despite the shock of realizing their last day in the building they call home was in March rather than June.

Hillel Day School teachers and staff mobilized to send off the graduates in a meaningful way despite the isolation. As a virtual graduation neared, hand-delivered packages contained lawn signs, caps and gowns, diplomas, and an invitation to travel down Memory Lane. Observing social distancing guidelines, families drove around Hillel’s campus in their cars, stopping at each grade’s exhibit to see photos, wave to teachers, and to recall moments in their educational journey, all the while accompanied by a customized Spotify playlist for each year of school.

More than a few tears were shed as parents and students waved their way around school property for the first time in three months. “Hats off to the faculty and staff. It was awesome” said parent and board member Ilana Glazier (Class of 1990).

“We really wanted to send off the kids in a special way,” said eighth grade Language Arts teacher Lauren Sterling, who also worked with the graduation writing team for the June 10 graduation program, which addressed the many emotions brought on by the pandemic.

The upside to a Zoom graduation was that out-of-town families who would have otherwise missed it were able to tune in to congratulate the graduates, and families gathered around computer screens and televisions to celebrate.

Eighth grade graduation speaker Ayelet Kaplan referenced Shakespeare’s famous line, “Beware the Ides of March,” connoting the gloom that befell the world in March 2020, but ultimately delivered a message of resilience, and thanked school for an overall experience common among alumni who have spent their formative years at Hillel Day School.

“Hillel has become a place of comfort for us, a place we have been fortunate to rely on for these past years. The community, teachers, and the peers we’ve grown to lean on have shaped us, so that when we finally move on, we have edited ourselves into our best versions yet. We are indebted to Hillel Day School for teaching us about our obligation and connection to Judaism and Israel, and for helping us to write the story of our own lives, the book of us.”

Karen Cash (Class of 1980)

A PARENT’S LETTER OF GRATITUDE

June 3, 2020

Dear Hillel Day School,

I am writing this note to express my deepest appreciation for all the teachers, administrators and anyone else involved with Hillel Day School for the past 20 years.

I attended Hillel myself, and was a member of the graduating class of 1980. Hillel has always been an important part of my life. What I learned there many years ago helped structure my Jewish foundation in life as an adult, as a parent, and as a member of this community.

20 years ago, when the time came to decide where my oldest son (Derek Wolfe, class of 2008) was going to go to school, I could not imagine any option but Hillel. I knew he would receive the best education, and that Hillel would prepare him for the big world that lay beyond the school. That feeling remained strong when my second son (Ethan Wolfe, class of 2011) began his studies.

Over the years, I admit, I have been a garden variety parent. Being a single working mom did not afford me the luxury of being able to participate in the PTO or volunteer for many committees to improve the school. I relied heavily on Hillel to create for my children a community they felt a part of and a Jewish identity they were proud of.

Now it is time for my youngest daughter (Talia Begres, class of 2020) to graduate. A wave of nostalgia has taken over, and I am dumbfounded as to where the last 20 years have gone. My daughter leaves Hillel with a strong sense of pride, an extended family she can count on, and an education that will help her succeed in the future. For Talia, Hillel truly rose to the challenge, and helped her to overcome obstacles where other private schools would have dropped the ball. For that, I am truly grateful.

I will miss the drives to and from school. They always provided me with time to communicate with my children, to learn about their day, their friends etc. I have watched my children grow into outstanding young people with a love for their Jewish community, a sense of social responsibility, and thoughtful, loyal friends.

With a heavy heart I say goodbye to Hillel Day School, and thank you so very much! I will always hold the school near and dear. You have been the best partner in helping me to raise my children. May the school continue to flourish for many years to come!

With much gratitude,

Karen Cash (Class of 1980)
Each year our athletic program plays a valuable role in the overall Hillel experience. This year, in addition to the athletic opportunities we provided through our intramural and interscholastic programs, our athletic department and the entire Hillel community celebrated the life and legacy left behind following the loss of our beloved Coach Tony Sanders in April, due to the coronavirus. This loss deeply impacted our community as Coach Tony played an integral role in the growth and development of our athletic program. Coach Tony was always “Playing it Forward,” there to help and support others in so many areas at school, in addition to keeping play and sports close to his heart.

Our current student athletes and alumni alike recognize our program for strengthening relationships among athletes and between athletes and coaches, providing the opportunity for leadership and teamwork that cannot be found in sports outside of Hillel, and offering space for collaboration, communication and building trust among teammates. More importantly, Hillel students recognized our athletic program for bringing great joy, providing a space for stress reduction and a positive outlet for expending energy.

We know our athletic program provides these valuable opportunities due to the devoted work of each of our coaches. Each year, we culminate athletics with our annual Kaufman Family Athletic Program. We were fortunate to still offer this program despite Michigan’s stay-at-home order to combat COVID-19. Our virtual program allowed us to celebrate our student-athletes and recognize the life and legacy of Coach Tony by paying tribute to him and renaming our Mensch Award in his honor.

Mazal Tov to all our athletic participants, award recipients, and our two eighth grade Scholar Athletes.

The Coach Tony Sanders Mensch Award Winners

**CROSS COUNTRY**
Gabe Cozetto and Sydney Michaelson

**BOYS’ SOCCER**
Ryan Schmeltz and Meir Shomer

**GIRLS’ VOLLEYBALL**
Mia Feingold

**BOYS’ BASKETBALL**
Aidan Squarcia

**GIRLS’ SOCCER**
Samantha Caminker

During Coach Tony’s 23 years at Hillel, it is estimated that he coached nearly 2,500 athletes. In the words of former Hillel athletic director Alita Rossen, “Tony held a high standard for all our athletes. While he appreciated winning, his aspirations for our athletes were much more. He encouraged everyone to do their best and support one another. He wanted good sportsmanship on and off the field, he wanted each of his athletes to truly feel they were part of the team. Because of Tony, Hillel athletes knew what it was to be a mensch.”

We renamed the Mensch Award in his honor with much love and support from the Kaufman family. Without the continued support and generosity of the Kaufman Family Athletic & Enrichment Fund, our program would not be what it is today.

Honor Coach Tony with a gift to the Coach Tony Memorial Scholarship Fund at www.hillelday.org/coachtony and celebrate Coach Tony’s life at Hillel and his impact on the Hillel community and students he loved.
NEW FAMILY PROFILE

MEET THE KESSLER FAMILY

BY GABRIELLA BURMAN, EDITOR

Jessica and Elliott Kessler could not have foreseen the move to remote learning when they chose Hillel Day School for their children, but wherever the learning takes place, they say, they feel confident that Hillel is the best school for their young family.

“We believe that every young child should have the opportunity to attend a Jewish day school,” said Jessica. “We want to make sure that our children are immersed in Jewish values and traditions early on.”

Elliott said.

The entire family, in fact, is being enriched by their Hillel experience. “The school’s culture of collaboration has spilled over into our home,” said Elliott. “The kids greet each other, and I appreciate the way the Early Childhood Center students had access to the greater facility, moving around the building, experiencing so much more than they would elsewhere.”

He says he had driven by the school countless times, but seeing Hillel firsthand was a revelation. “To know there is a school that can enrich your soul along with your education, it was super impressive.”

For Jessica, a native of Montreal, it was her interactions with Hillel alumni who babysat for Lilly, as well as for her younger siblings, Maya, now entering kindergarten, and Leo, 2, that piqued her curiosity about Hillel.

“You can always pick out Hillel graduates - the way they communicate, take direction, present themselves,” she said.

Once they enrolled, they say, Lilly made new friends immediately as a kindergartener. “We can’t say enough about her teachers, who were so patient and supportive of her growth,” said Jessica. “The school’s commitment to ensuring that no student gets lost in the shuffle. They really care about each child.”

The couple, who met as staff at Tamarack Camps, first visited Hillel when daughter Lilly, now entering first grade, was attending preschool close to the couple’s home in Huntington Woods.

“The tour blew me away,” said Elliott, the vice president of finance for the Detroit Lions. “The kids greeted us, and I appreciated the way the Early Childhood Center students had access to the greater facility, moving around the building, experiencing so much more than they would elsewhere.”

“A student’s happiness is the primary focus at Hillel,” said Jessica. “We were excited to see how much Lilly was enjoying her time there.”

For the Kesslers, who moved to Michigan from Florida, Hillel Day School became an integral part of their lives, with both parents involved in different ways. Jessica, a native of Montreal, served as a parent volunteer and later as a board member, while Elliott immersed himself in the school’s culture of collaboration.

“Whether in school or at home, Hillel is about striking the right balance for kids, giving them a well-rounded education, ensuring their spiritual growth, and creating a welcoming community of friends and teachers,” said Jessica.

The Kesslers, who have two children, said they are grateful for the relationships they have formed with teachers and other parents.

“I loved that part of the book,” said parent Amy Berman. “We’re a family of six, and everyone participates to maintain our home.”

“It’s not just about the kids. It’s about the whole family,” said Elliott.

“I liked it very much,” said Dr. Jacobson. “It helps parents understand the importance of setting boundaries and expectations for their children.”

“I'm not saying that kids should never be able to do something on their own, but it's important to teach them how to handle situations and make decisions for themselves.”

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“I'm not saying that kids should never be able to do something on their own, but it's important to teach them how to handle situations and make decisions for themselves.”
As parents, we sometimes live to get through the day! It is difficult to make ourselves a priority and escape the “Mom guilt” that comes when we put ourselves first. But sometimes, in order to be the best version of yourself, you need to take time for yourself. Sometimes you need to feed your soul.

In February, I did just that when I travelled on the AISH Destiny Women’s Trip to Israel. I travelled with 10 women from Detroit, including 6 other Hillel mothers. We toured new sites, learned from world-class speakers, and experienced Shabbat together. The trip was an opportunity to not only continue my personal Jewish journey, but also to learn with other women who are as invested in Israel as I am.

I have been to Israel many times, but there is always more to discover there. On this trip, we were fortunate enough to travel to sites I had never seen before, including Rachel’s Tomb, the Tomb of the Matriarchs and Patriarchs, Meirat Hamachpeiah, and the ancient city of Shiloh. The speakers and classes made the biggest impression on me. We heard from rabbis speaking on the importance of gratitude and kindness, from professionals on value-based parenting, and from a counterterrorism expert on the status of terrorism in Israel and around the world. Each day brought new information to share at home; each day was an opportunity to grow as a person.

Growing up a student at Hillel Day School, I took for granted the gift of my Jewish day school education, and I didn’t necessarily stop to consider that Jewish values and Zionism were shaping me into the person I am today. Now, as an adult, I embrace this gift. By sending my children to Hillel I am providing them with the same gift – an opportunity to make Judaism and Zionism truly part of their souls.

My participation in this trip also modeled for my children that learning is an ongoing pursuit throughout life. Jewish learning is always relevant to who we are at each stage of our lives. Zionism is a part of our core as a people and as a family. By feeding my Jewish soul I came back from Israel a better mother, wife, and friend.

FRIDAYS WITH FAIN
As part of our efforts to enrich Jewish family life, “Fridays with Fain” gave families a headstart for Shabbat.

“Our aim is to enhance the Shabbat atmosphere at Hillel, and give parents material to take home,” Rabbi David Fain, our Rav Beit Hasefer, said.

Each Friday after dismissal, parents were invited to gather with their children by the fireplace for a Shabbat story, or in the lobby for a treat or activity with Rabbi Fain. Each week, he also shared a few words of inspiration related to the weekly parasha, and around holidays, held themed activities such as dreidel spinning for Chanukkah or hamantaschen tasting for Purim.
HILLEL CONTINUES TO LEAD, ENGAGE, AND INSPIRE

BY AMY SCHLUSSEL, DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT

The Advancement Office strategically supports the school’s mission to deliver an inspired Jewish education through the recruitment and retention of students, nurturing donor relations, creating community both internally and externally, and communicating the value of a Hillel education to all our constituents. Despite the coronavirus, the strength of our community to boost these efforts in - and out of - school was proudly on display.

The year started on a high note, with back-to-school activities including our annual Welcome Back Shabbat dinner, and a Rosh Hashanah art greeting card contest. In December, Movies & Munchies thanked parents who gave to the Annual Fund during our initial 60-day campaign. When choosing our Annual Fund campaign theme, “Soar with Hillel,” we never could have imagined how high, as our community mobilized to provide relief to families affected adversely by the pandemic.

Ultimately, Hillel was able to give an additional $95,000 dollars to 65 families and to provide more than 60 devices to students so that they could learn at home during our remote learning period. This support was in addition to the $3.2 million previously allocated this school year.

Despite the pandemic, Hillel continued to lead, inspire, and engage students and families with not only remote learning but also with lively community programs. What we had envisioned as our first-ever all-school Grandfriends Day transformed into a day of online activity wherein students sent artwork, letters, video messages, and poetry to their loved ones, and culminated in a Friday night Shabbat candle lighting and slideshow in their honor. Other candle lighting ceremonies honored first responders in Hillel’s community, and our Class of 2020.

We also instituted a successful Sponsor A Day of Learning initiative to give donors an opportunity to show their support for our robust learning program with a gift of $180 the Annual Fund, and this effort will continue next school year, regardless of whether school is in-person or remote.

Unfortunately, we had to postpone our Leadership Circle event and our Annual Gala, where we were scheduled to gather as a community and celebrate Hillel Day School and our honorees Sheri and David Jaffa, and Distinguished Alumni recipients Jessica Alter, and Senator Jeremy Moss. God willing, we will come together next year to celebrate them on May 23, 2021. Save the Date! (bios following).

Thanks to the generosity of 458 donors, Hillel Day School’s Annual Fund raised $569,975 during a challenging time, sending a strong message to the community that our supporters believe in our mission to educate as many Jewish children in metropolitan Detroit as possible.

As we plan tirelessly for next year, we look forward to safely welcoming over 70 new students into our nearly full Early Childhood Center and over 60 new students into K-8. No matter what next year brings, we remain unwavering in advocating for Hillel’s mission and creating a welcoming, engaging, supportive community for our students, their families, alumni, and everyone in between. Our story, our history, and our traditions will continue to be learned and understood by future generations of Hillel students so that the Jewish people can continue to thrive.

"DESPITE THE CORONAVIRUS, THE STRENGTH OF OUR COMMUNITY WAS PROUDLY ON DISPLAY IN SUPPORT OF OUR SCHOOL MISSION."
Jessica credits Hillel with instilling in her the importance of community. “Everything I’ve done involves building a community, and Hillel was my first one,” she said. The choices and friendships she made at Hillel continue to inform and shape her life, she said. “I’m close with classmates and teachers to this day, especially Adina Levin and Cindy Left,” she recalls.

“And to think, it may have all started with selling matzah!”

STATE SENATOR JEREMY MOSS

Distinguished Alumni recipient Michigan State Senator Jeremy Moss (class of 2000) is serving his first term representing the 11th district in southern Oakland County. His political career started in 2011 as a Southfield City Council member, when, at age 25, he became the youngest-ever elected official in the city’s history.

He was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives in 2014 and began his work across the aisle to make the inner dealings of government transparent, “so our constituents know what we’re doing with their time and their dollars,” he said. He also introduced legislation to end the practice of gerrymandering, which became a ballot proposal that passed in 2018.

Elected to the Senate in 2018, several of Jeremy’s bills have become law, including legislation to give tax relief to Michigan homeowners and to help high school dropouts find a path toward returning to school to earn their diploma. He is working on proposals to expand employment opportunities for citizens with past criminal convictions and to make auto insurance affordable. He is also the sponsor of a bill that protects LGBTQ individuals from housing and employment discrimination.

After graduation from Hillel, Jeremy attended Groves High School, and Michigan State University, where he studied journalism and political science and participated in humanitarian missions around the globe.

A member of Congregation Beth Ahm, and an advisory board member of the Martin Luther King Task Force in Southfield, Jeremy’s commitment to social justice and kindness, cultivated at Hillel, is ever-lasting.

He remains close with many Hillel classmates and visits the school each year to mentor eighth-grade students during their “Campaign for A Cause” project, wherein they campaign on behalf of local non-profit organizations, and to speak with fifth graders during their learning about the three branches of government. He also personally tours our fourth graders during their visit to the Michigan State Capitol each year, a highlight of their trip to see “government in action” in Lansing!

Pave the Way to Hillel’s Future

When our ECC opened in the fall, it included beautiful outdoor spaces with a pathway containing specially engraved bricks honoring or memorializing a loved one. Leave a legacy at Hillel by purchasing a brick to be installed at the end of the summer. Learn more and purchase your brick at https://www.hillelday.org/brickcampaign

Save the Date

Hillel’s Annual Gala
Sunday, May 23, 2021
DONOR PROFILE
Lisa and Danny Klein
BY GABRIELLA BURMAN, EDITOR

After selling their real estate portfolio in 2018, Lisa and Danny Klein found themselves in a position to
make a difference in the lives of others. They turned their attention to philanthropy and thoughtfully considered what they wanted to do — and for whom. Danny says a theme emerged: “Our Jewish community, and particularly, the youth of our community”

As the parents of Hillel Day School alumni, the school immediately figured into their financial planning. “ Bringing Judaism into a house when children are young is fundamental to their development, and I remember the feeling of warmth I would have at temple, watching my children recite the prayers they learned at Hillel,” Danny said.

Especially in the face of growing assimilation, and the couple’s concern that each generation is becoming further removed from their heritage, “we want to encourage a good Jewish education,” Lisa added.

Danny’s sons, Josh (class of 2014), a rising junior at University of Michigan, and Ben (class of 2016), an incoming freshman at Michigan State University, made wonderful friends at Hillel, and gained “powerful insight into the teachings of Judaism.” They both also received tuition assistance during the 2008-2009 recession, which allowed the family to keep the boys enrolled at school.

“Thankfully there were people and funds in place at Hillel to help my family when my kids were going through school, and now that I am able to pay it forward, I want to do my part to help future generations,” Danny said.

Having experienced the power of a Hillel education, as well as the school’s commitment to support families in adverse financial situations, as many now face uncertainty during the coronavirus pandemic, the Kleins feel strongly that “no Jewish family should be turned away from our community Jewish day school due to financial reasons.”

Their leadership level gift to Hillel enables them to fulfill another aspiration, too — that Josh, Ben, and Lisa’s daughters Hannah and Sydney Knoll, see their parents as “good role models” whose actions speak louder than words. “Giving financially to organizations you feel passionately about shows your children the importance of giving back to your community,” Lisa said. “Our children are aware of our commitment to the Jewish community, and to organizations like Hillel that are at the forefront of giving children a sense of where they come from.”

Ultimately, “what we want,” Danny said, “is for every parent whose child is thirsty for Jewish education to be able to tell them ‘yes,’ you can go to Hillel Day School.”

TRANSFORMING TOMORROW STARTS TODAY
BY AMY SCHLUSSEL, DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT

Hillel is proud to be an innovative Jewish day school dedicated to providing modern education in a cutting-edge facility with outstanding faculty. Hillel’s future depends upon a more secure financial foundation to support the highest levels of educational excellence, as well as ensuring access for all Jewish families, regardless of income. In order to serve the next generation, and to maintain and expand the environment in which students learn, the substantial growth of Hillel’s endowment is a top priority.

We have witnessed the success of schools with robust endowments that now have the wherewithal to ride out the current pandemic. Hillel’s endowment enables the school to flourish and meet the needs of our students and community during this challenging time. Building Hillel’s endowment is the most important investment we can make, allowing the school to not only sustain itself but to thrive.

Hillel’s reliance on tuition and annual giving alone will not ensure its long-term viability. A significant increase in the endowment will protect Hillel from future challenges like the current pandemic crisis, enable Hillel to increase the annual payout towards operating costs and programs, and allow Hillel the flexibility to invest in resources and other innovative programs and priorities guided by its values, rather than by external forces. A strong endowment also ensures Hillel is able to attract and retain quality teachers, enhance the school’s commitment to innovative education, and provide much-needed tuition assistance to meet the growing demand for high-quality Jewish education.

With gratitude, we acknowledge those before us whose forethought, hard work, and resources created the school to grow today and to announce the TRANSFORMING TOMORROW STARTS TODAY endowment campaign. We also extend gratitude to those families who prioritized the future of Hillel this past year with the following endowment gifts:

Jim Berger created The Jim Berger Family Endowment Fund for Mathematical Excellence. Proceeds enable professional growth opportunities for faculty members in mathematics, the advancement of the math curriculum, and subsequently, additional learning opportunities for Hillel students.

Amy and Jared Berman created The Amy and Jared Berman Washington, D.C. Scholarship Endowment Fund. Proceeds will support the seventh grade Washington, D.C. trip.

The Seymour D. Finkel Foundation created The Seymour D. Finkel Memorial Scholarship Fund to improve the scholarship program at Hillel, with the availability to also fund school lunches for students needing lunch assistance.

Emily and Josh Hunegs and family created The Hunegs Family Endowment Fund for the First Grade Siddur Party. Proceeds will be used to name and enhance the first grade Siddur Party, a beloved tradition and rite of passage at Hillel.

The community created The Coach Tony Sanders Memorial Scholarship Fund. Proceeds will be used to memorialize Hillel’s beloved Coach Tony and to enhance and improve the scholarship program.

Hillel also acknowledges those who enhanced their legacy through a planned gift to further support Hillel’s endowment. The following donors made Hillel a part of their estate plan this past year and/or increased their current estate plan allocation to Hillel: Monica and Ari Fischman; Sheri and David Jaffa; and Lisa and Danny Klein.

We invite you to leave a lasting impact on Hillel by bestow- ing funds to secure a Hillel Jewish education for generations to come. If you have already made Hillel a part of your estate plan, please let us know so that we can properly recognize you.

For more information about the endowment, please contact Amy Schlussel at 248-539-1484 or aschlussel@hillelday.org.

THANK YOU TO THE HILLEL DAY SCHOOL 2019-2020 SPONSORS

To learn about our 2020-2021 sponsorship opportunities, contact Marni Cherrin at mcherrin@hillelday.org or Amy Schlussel at aschlussel@hillelday.org
Q&A WITH BEBE SCHAEFER, CLASS OF 2015

BEBE SCHAEFER (CLASS OF 2015) RECENTLY COMPLETED HER FRESHMAN YEAR AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN WASHINGTON D.C. FOR A COURSE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY SINCE 2001, SHE WAS ASKED TO WRITE AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY TO CONNECT HER PERSONAL EXPERIENCE TO THE LARGER CULTURAL CONTEXT. IN A THOROUGHLY WELL-RESEARCHED REPORT, SCHAEFER EXAMINED HER HILLEL DAY SCHOOL EDUCATION AND ITS CORE JEWISH VALUES AS THEY RELATED TO HER UPBRINGING, THE WAY SHE BEST LEARNED, AND HER PLACE IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AS A YOUNG JEWISH WOMAN. “IT IS MY MISSION, MY BIRTHRIGHT, TO CHANGE THE WORLD FOR THE BETTER, THAT IS MY HIGHER PURPOSE, AND IT IS DUE TO MY JEWISH VALUES-BASED EDUCATION THAT I CAME TO THAT REALIZATION,” SHE CONCLUDED.

Q. What was the context for writing an autoethnography?

A. I wrote this for my complex problems course called “No Child Left Behind...Really?” We analyzed educational policy from 2001 onward from a student perspective. We analyzed intersectional student experiences using student voice throughout the course. At the end of the semester, we were tasked to write an autoethnography, to use our voices to write about our own educational experiences, and how they affected us as learners and as people.

Q. Having joined Hillel as a fifth grader, were you surprised to find that your Hillel education would figure so prominently?

A. I wasn’t surprised, as my Hillel education was something different than I had experienced previously in public school. The idea of so closely intertwining faith with education ultimately paved the way for Hillel to have a profound effect on me. The teachers I referenced in my autoethnography (past Judaic Studies teacher Ariel Wolgel, 5-8 math coordinator Michelle Bortnick) were representative of the impact that Hillel had on me as a learner and as a person.

Q. Have you settled on a major? If so, what and why? Where do you see yourself in five years?

A. American University offers an interdisciplinary major called CLEG: communications, legal institutions, economics, and government. I plan to pursue something having to do with politics and policy down the road. I also may attend law school. I’m thankful to have many options I can pursue, and I know that I am well-equipped to handle any opportunity that will come my way due to my Jewish values-based education!
HALLIE BERGER (CLASS OF 2007) won second place for her research on overnight camp for underserved youth from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology Campus Graduate Research Forum.

BENJAMIN KATZ (CLASS OF 2008) is a medical student at Washington University in St. Louis. During the pandemic, he teamed up with the Salvation Army to deliver food to homebound individuals in the city.

NICOLE KAHAN (CLASS OF 2014) has completed her sophomore year at Wayne State University, and is an inaugural board member of the Friendship Circle’s UMatter program.

JEREMY KAHAN (CLASS OF 2016) is ranked second best goalie in the state for high school ice hockey.

ALLISON BLOOMBERG (CLASS OF 2013) has been selected as a member of the 2020-21 Hillel International Student Cabinet, which serves as the student advisory body for the Hillel college campus movement.

RACHEL ISRAEL (CLASS OF 2014) won second place for her research on oversight camp for underserved youth from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology Campus Graduate Research Forum.


ARI WEISS (CLASS OF 2014) is a lone soldier serving in the Handasah Kravit (combat engineering) unit of the IDF.

EMMA CHERRIN (CLASS OF 2017) designed the winning T-Shirt in a contest for a collaboration between Girl Up, the United Nations Adolescent Girl Campaign, and athletic wear company Fabletics.

LIANA TARNAPOL (CLASS OF 2017) won first place in high school musical theater at the National Association of Teachers of Singing, Great Lakes Regional, in March 2020.
WHY DONATE?

TUITION ASSISTANCE
Provide much-needed tuition assistance to enable over half of our students to attend.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Enable Hillel to attract and retain quality teachers

EXPAND LEARNING
Enhance our commitment to excellence and innovative education through science, technology, our MakerSpace, art, athletics, music, library, and the greenhouse

4 EASY WAYS TO DONATE

ONLINE at hilleday.org/online_giving

PHONE at 248-851-6950

MAIL to 32200 Middlebelt Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48334

ANYTIME in the Advancement Office

EVERY STUDENT COUNTS. EVERY GIFT COUNTS.
ALL DONATIONS ARE GREATLY APPRECIATED.