



THE ELECTRONIC EDUCATOR-
A weekly update of information for you and your school!
A service of the NJ Region USCJ Dept. of Education
Michelle Rich, Director of Education and Youth Activities
Nita Polay Levin, Field Worker
Lisa Harris Glass, Executive Director

preschool corner

Here are the notes from EC Dir Chat September 3, 2008. No call in October due to all the holidays, but we're back on for November, and I already have the number (see below!). L'Shana tova - may this year be a year of health and growth!

Next Call: Wednesday November 5, 3:15 NY (2:15 Central, 1:15 Mountain, 12:15 Pacific) Call in number is 1-605-475-4150, access code 32845 – Suggested topic – Anxious parents, stressed teachers, positive and supportive strategies as children move through the school (year by year). Making Thanksgiving Jewish

Call notes

CAJE was wonderful – much better weather than last year. The sessions were a bit feast or famine – either there were 4 things that looked appealing or none. About 250 early childhood people attended, and 17 people got up at 7am to come have breakfast with Max! CAJE is Aug 2-6, 2009 in San Antonio TX next year.

Debbie's conference is coming up this month in Gainesville, and she's got nice attendance from schools all around her. The most popular sessions among teachers: Science and Judaism, and King David in the Classroom – delving deeper into biblical characters.

Shofar

It's Elul. Max asked if anyone is blowing shofar daily (no one on the call currently is). Judy suggested just having someone blow the shofar in the hall to pique the kid's interest (make sure all the classroom doors are open). We discussed introducing the shofar to the kids at a gathering first (to help kids not be scared) and whether to blow the traditional single tekiah, or to blow all the calls for the sake of education. There is no blessing said before the blow during Elul, and the shofar is not blown the last day of Elul (Monday the 29th). Blowing the shofar each day of Elul builds up anticipation for the Yamim Noraim.

Judy tells us: if the kids are fearful, we can help them “build up a little emotional muscle.”

New beginnings

A few people had their day for kids to come see the classroom and meet the teachers the day before the first day of school, which was very good timing (even if it was on a Sunday). Splitting the class for smaller groups was a good strategy.

A coffee and shmooze for new parents was a good thing. Planting “seasoned” parents there to help soothe new parents worked well too. Judy took digital pictures of kids once they had started enjoying themselves, and brought them to the parents who were worrying in another room. For one mom who had to leave, she took the picture of the happy kid with her phone and texted the mom. The mom later brought her flowers to show her how much that had helped her.

Phyllis is beginning a mentoring program to match seasoned moms with new moms, and will keep us posted on how that helps new moms not “get lost.”

Pictures are worth a thousand words. Judy posts pictures weekly on snapfish.com and sends the links out. Phyllis puts them on the website. My 4 year old's teacher emailed out a note with pictures today (and says she'll do it every day) which was great. I think we can also strive to post short clips on youtube (with no identifying info) and send links to parents. Is there a place to post videos that can be accessed by password only?

Mentoring and building community

Debbie has homeroom parents call new parents the first couple of weeks of school, to check in, personally invite them to school events...

Debbie's mom's night out – hosted by a mom, appetizers, wine and a small gift (candle lighting Shabbat thing) provided by school, social time - 20 out of 50 moms are coming.

Also Debbie's – Neighborhood Pot-luck Shabbat Dinners – organized groups of 5-6 families by zipcode (proximity) to have Shabbat dinner together, about a month into school. School supplies wine, challah and candles. They've worked through the Shomer Shabbat and kashrut issues with sensitivity, although Debbie may be house hopping to help all the families (especially the non-Jewish ones!) say all the blessings.

Fundraising

Debbie has a ho-down in November - \$36 a family, square dance, simple dinner, raffle, clear about \$1000.

Judy – Shop around the school – they rent tables to a bunch of vendors at \$100 a pop, families come and shop, also have auctions and raffles, not a lot of work but a big return – 7-10K

Inviting alumni families keeps them in the community and ups the returns.

Other ideas – fantasy football or basketball pool

Also, having each class create an item (bench, canvas painting, flower planter) for sale at auction to parents.

With fundraising, there are several issues to consider:

- Tzedakah is a Jewish obligation. We want to create a culture of giving without nickel and diming our parents to death.
- We need to balance the appeals parents get from both the EC and the synagogue so it does not get overwhelming.
- People are more likely to contribute to the synagogue if it directly affects their kids (ie a security system for the synagogue will help protect their kids).

It's Eilat - did you hear the shofar today?

Maxine Handelman
Consultant for Early Childhood Education
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
847-641-9963
Fax: 773-929-4387
www.uscj.org

Shalom, colleagues,
For our friends who are facing this difficult hurricane season, our thoughts and prayers are with you. We hope you weather the storms with little damage and few disruptions. For those who needed to evacuate, we wish you a speedy and safe return.

Our thanks to Nachama Skolnick Moskowitz, Director of the Department of Curriculum of the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland (JECC) for this valuable resource. This special response curriculum can assist Jewish educators as you guide your students through the election season with a Jewish lens. It is grounded in traditional Jewish text, and has facts and reflections that are of benefit to

the Jewish denominations.

Our thanks to Nachama and the JECC for this timely response curriculum. You can check out other valuable resources on a variety of topics and curricula on their web page at www.jecc.org.

Susan Wyner
North American Consultant for Synagogue Education

wyner@uscj.org

If you would like a copy of the curriculum, which is designed for Middle School and High School students, contact Nita at Levin@USCJ.org.

== ==

Shalom, Colleagues. Many of you either sponsor a "meet and greet" for parents, or involve your teachers in some way in parent interactions, either at programs or family education activities. Even as principals and ed directors, the tips from master teacher Marsha Raitzel offer valuable ways of approaching our interactions with parents.

This is an article from the free e-mail service offered by Teacher Magazine. You can sign up for yourself to receive these educational nuggets at www.teachermagazine.com.

Teaching Secrets: The Parent Meet and Greet

By Marsha Ratzel

Back-to-school night sends chills up the spine of many teachers. Somehow standing in front of parents and explaining yourself can reduce even the most seasoned veteran to rubble.

The big key to a successful parent meet-and-greet experience is preparation. Think about the questions that most parents are going to want answered and make a list. If you're a rookie, you can ask other teachers for ideas about what typically comes up. Armed with your list, you'll be able to think about your responses. And if you're not sure how to respond to parent questions, ask a colleague to help you prepare.

You can bet that parents will ask you questions that would be better handled in a one-on-one phone call or meeting. Know these questions are coming and prepare a diplomatic way of suggesting a more appropriate time to discuss them. When the timing is right, you'll be ready.

Most back-to-school events have a limited period when you're facing a group of parents and all eyes are on you. Often it's ten minutes or less. You have to convince yourself for those ten minutes that you are the expert, even if you feel like you don't know a thing. Many teachers also find it helpful to prepare a short handout that covers administrative details. It may relieve future confusion or questions because parents can refer to it.

Remember that this is what most parents want to know: (1) You're going to treat their child fairly; and (2) You are committed to teaching both the curriculum and other skills well, including how to stay organized, study for a test, take notes, make a mistake and recover from it, and become a lifelong learner. Parents want reassurance that you'll listen to them as a valued partner in their child's school year. You don't want to give them the impression that you'll do anything they want, but you do want them to know you are available to hear their concerns.

This time with parents early in the school year is a teacher's opportunity to shine and it is hard for many teachers to step up and do this. But for this one evening, you really have to show 'em what you've got!

What is most important to remember:

- Let parents know you're thrilled to be there and excited to meet everyone, even if you aren't. Actually, most teachers *are* happy to meet and greet, but their nervousness may overshadow their excitement, leaving them with that frightened-deer look.

- You're the expert. You know more about your curriculum, the way your classroom works, and how you interact with students than any other person in the room. Even if you're a brand new first-year teacher, you're still the authority when it comes to your teaching plans.
- Parents want reassurance. Be sure to tell them how they can help their child with the type of homework and projects you plan to assign.
- Be very specific about *where* and *how* parents can find out about homework and grades. If you maintain a Web site, print out stickers with the Web address on it. I've known teachers who put the stickers on refrigerator magnets for handy reference. If you let parents know what to expect from you, especially in terms of how you communicate homework and grades, the year will go smoothly.
- This is your opportunity to sell parents on your classroom. Don't paint a false reality. Provide an honest view.
- Don't focus on the operational aspects of class. Rules, grading policies, syllabi, and classroom expectations can be covered in a handout which parents can read and refer to long after the evening is over. I can't stress it enough: Reassuring parents is what matters most.
- Lay out in plain view sets of the textbooks, reference materials, and special equipment that students will use.
- Clearly explain how parents can reach you. If you prefer e-mail, be sure to provide them with your e-mail address. If you prefer to be contacted by phone, let parents know when they can reach you. Give them a sense of your turnaround time for an e-mail or a phone call.
- Switch your viewpoint. Instead of feeling like you're under the microscope, realize that this is your chance to research your parents and get an impression of them. Don't be reactive. Ask them questions about their kids. Probe and learn.
- Have a notepad handy so you can jot down what you promise to do. This might be coordinating something for parents through the office, scheduling a conference, or sending home extra copies of something. In the hub-bub of the evening, without notes you may forget what you promise. This would make a terrible first impression.
- This is a great time to recruit parent volunteers for field trips and special days where an extra pair of adult hands is needed. One teacher I know recruits parents to help her change the displays of student work in her room and the hallway. Another teacher asks parents to share their professional or vocational expertise for science labs or to talk about their interests. Some even serve as consultants for classroom projects.
- Most of all, smile, relax, and enjoy the evening.

Learning the ropes of back-to-school events is tough work. The good news is that once you have, you'll have a powerful tool at your disposal for any event where parents are gathered. By offering guidance and setting clear expectations for parents at the start of the year, you can help their children achieve success in the classroom.

Marsha Ratzel is a National Board-certified teacher in the Blue Valley, Kansas public schools. After serving as a district-wide technology and curriculum coach, she now teaches middle school math and science.

Susan E. Wyner
 United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
 North American Consultant for Synagogue Education
wyner@uscj.org

** ** ** ** **

Thanks to Roberta Ginsberg, Preschool Director at Pine Brook Jewish Center in Montville for this gem and her permission to share it with everyone!

Below is a form that I had created and sent home.

UP-COMING TEACHER TRAINING MINI-COURSES

COURSE 5: INFUSING THE PRESCHOOL CLASS WITH JEWISH VALUES

INSTRUCTOR: JANICE JUMBO, consultant, veteran teacher, Mentor Teacher

What about our preschool room lets all who enter know that this is a Jewish program? Is there an Israeli flag or a Shabbat set in the house corner? Are there kipot in the dress-up corner and on the snack table? Do we bring God into our discussions when we see something extraordinary in nature? Do we sing Jewish songs or use a Hebrew greeting when children enter? Janice, a very creative and innovative teacher, has been teaching nursery school Jewishly for many years. Participants in this Mini-Course will leave with many ideas they will feel comfortable adding to their daily routine, including Circle Time. You may want to bring a tape recorder!

DATE: Friday, September 19, 12:30 - 2 p.m.

LOCATION: Cong. Oheb Shalom, South Orange

COURSE # 6: DEVELOPING A SENSITIVITY TO CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

INSTRUCTOR: WENDY DRATLER, Special Needs Consultant

Wendy Dratler, our Special Needs consultant who taught our *New Jewish Child Left Aside* course, will aid educators to "feel what it is like to be disabled," allowing for empathy for these individuals and the experiences they struggle with the mainstream. Participants will have hands-on experiences, benefit from sensitivity lessons that are tied to Bible stories, how Torah tells us to treat the disabled, and how to make students with disabilities feel like the star of the class.

DATE: Sun., October 5, 12:45 - 2:15 p.m. > *Please note the new time and corrected date and location*

LOCATION: Cong. Beth El, South Orange >

COURSE 7: INFUSING THE PRESCHOOL CLASS WITH JEWISH VALUES

INSTRUCTOR: JANICE JUMBO

Please see course description above

DATE: Mon., Oct. 27, 4 - 5:30 p.m.

LOCATION: Beth El Synagogue, E. Windsor

COURSE # 8: DEVELOPING A SENSITIVITY TO CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

INSTRUCTOR: WENDY DRATLER

Please see course description above

DATE: Sunday, November 9, 12:45 - 2:15 p.m. >*Note the correct date*

LOCATION: Temple Israel, Ridgewood

COURSE 9: *B'TZELEM ELOKIM*: DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY OF MENSCHEN

INSTRUCTOR: DR. SHOSHANA SILBERMAN

Learning to treat each other with respect and dignity in the way in which Judaism teaches is a reflection of God. In this Mini-Course, participants will learn how to develop a cohesive community of students exhibiting *menschlichkeit* behavior, understanding that we are all created in the image of God.

DATE: Sunday, November 23, 9 - 10:30

LOCATION: Temple Beth Torah, Ocean

If you are interested in attending any of these courses, contact Michelle Rich at Rich@USCJ.org. As a benefit of your synagogue's membership in United Synagogue, all courses are free for teachers affiliated with a USCJ school or anyone who is a member of a USCJ congregation.
