



CESJDS Educational Support Services UPDATE

From Lenore Layman, Director of Educational Support Services

Welcome to the Spring 2017 CESJDS Educational Support Services Update. I wanted to take this opportunity to share some highlights from this year and give you a preview of some plans for the coming year.

Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Consultation: This year, the Lower School hired a part-time occupational therapist to observe in classrooms, consult with teachers, and provide suggestions and ongoing professional development to our faculty about accommodations that we could incorporate into our classrooms. Suggestions included ideas to address sensory needs, self regulation, focus, core strength, and fine motor areas. Next year, we look forward to continuing to partner with an occupational therapist who will provide ongoing consultation in these areas. We will add the consultative services of a speech and language therapist who will also observe in classrooms and provide suggestions to our teachers about best practices in the area of speech and language for students in need of classroom accommodations.



Executive Functioning: We will continue our focus on executive function strategy instruction and support in our Lower and Middle Schools next year. Integration of lessons from the SMARTS curriculum developed by ResearchILD in Massachusetts will continue in the Middle School in a variety of content area classes as well as in Y'sodot. A team of Lower School teachers will be working together over the summer and next year to further develop our EF curriculum, which will include integrating EF strategies throughout our content areas. Additionally, a full day of professional development is planned for January 2018 on executive functioning. We have invited Sarah Ward, a speech and language therapist from Boston, to work with our faculty next year in this area (<http://efpractice.com>). We want to acknowledge the leadership role that the following faculty members have taken in developing our school's EF curriculum: Heidi Tackill, Sarah Andrea, Deborah Feigenson, and Gabrielle Plasterik.

B'Yadenu ("In Our Hands") Project: Next year, CESJDS will be participating in a year-long project with the Federation of Greater Washington and Gateways Center for Professional Development in Boston along with several other area day schools. The purpose of this project is to pinpoint areas for improvement in serving students with diverse learning needs and to set goals for our school to meet these goals. Implementation of targeted professional development related to achieving these goals is a key aspect of this project. CESJDS will be working on this project in our Middle School next year and has formed a faculty team that will be working together throughout the year to reflect on our current support services and to set goals for improving our services. The other area day schools participating in this project are the Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy, Gesher Jewish Day School, and the Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capitol.

Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month: The ESS Department spearheaded efforts this year for CESJDS to participate in JDAIM during February 2017. JDAIM has been recognized nationally for the last nine years as a way to collectively promote the importance of including people with disabilities in Jewish communal life. Jewish schools, synagogues, and communal organizations throughout the country have made it a priority to recognize this month in a variety of ways. General and Judaic studies teachers in the Lower School taught lessons about disability awareness and inclusion during the month of February and Middle School students participated in a lesson during their Kolot period and heard Joy Welan, a CESJDS graduate speak. Joy is a disabilities attorney for the Department of Justice. She has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair.

We appreciate the ongoing commitment of our faculty to meeting the needs of our diverse student body and appreciate the partnership of our parents and area clinicians who partner with us during the school year. Please reach out with any questions: llyman@cesjds.org.

The ESS department greatly appreciates support from the:

- The Feder Family Endowment Fund for Tuition Assistance & Educational Support Services
- The Jacob Friehling Endowment For Support of Students With Special Needs
- The Gudelsky Special Needs Endowment
- The Margolius Family Endowment Fund
- The Harry and Esther Plotkin Endowment
- The Shirley St. Martin Endowment

Additional Content on CESJDS Links!

Visit our community blog to read "Proficiency Approach for Learning Hebrew for Students who Struggle with a Second Language" by Jenna Schilit & Adi Zaken (Learning Specialists), and Daniella Friedman (Judaic Studies & Hebrew Language Coordinator).

www.cesjds.org/LinksArticle

Reading Instruction in the Upper Elementary Grades

Molly Chilton, Learning Specialist



The focus of reading instruction changes qualitatively throughout elementary school. When children are first entering school, they are learning to decode text and appreciate that print is a tool for storytelling and providing information. The middle grades represent a shift between learning to read and reading to learn. As students get older, greater emphasis is placed on different components of reading comprehension, such as fluency and vocabulary.

Reading comprehension is the product of one's oral language abilities and decoding skills. We can only understand what we read if we are able to decipher and comprehend the words. In the intermediate and upper grades, students are expected to understand the literal meaning of, think deeply about, and respond specifically to various texts. Strategy groups in fourth and fifth grade focus on helping students monitor their own understanding by interacting with the text using questioning strategies that clarify meaning and deepen understanding. They also focus on ways to construct clear and specific responses to reading, articulating clear connections among multiple texts.

Fluency is the ability to read words accurately, at a good pace, and with the proper intonation. When students are still working to decode individual words or to group them into meaningful phrases, children are left with fewer attentional resources to devote to the meaning of the text. Some of our fourth grade strategy groups address fluency through specific word attack skills, reading phonetically controlled texts, choral reading, repeated reading, and even listening to recordings of their own reading to improve self-monitoring skills. In fifth grade, one reading strategy group focuses on the DISSECT method which focuses on strategies for breaking words apart into prefixes, suffixes, and root words.

Vocabulary is another essential aspect of reading comprehension. Beyond knowing many individual word meanings, readers must understand how words work together, when words have multiple meanings and when words are being used figuratively, rather than literally. The majority of vocabulary we learn comes from reading, and research has found that we even come to understand new words that might not even appear in the texts we read. For example, we can understand the word 'slither' better by reading about snakes, even if the author doesn't use this word!

One aspect of vocabulary that can be challenging for students in the intermediate grades are homographs (words that are spelled the same but have multiple meanings such as 'bat'), and homophones (words that sound alike, but have different meanings). Strategy groups address commonly confused words through encounters with a variety of fiction and nonfiction text, through direct instruction, and also using puns and riddles. These different types of instruction and targeted practice with specific components of reading help build independent readers who are able to think critically about a variety of texts.

ESS at the Upper School

Susan Zuckerman, Feder Family Educational Support Services Chair



Several weeks ago I received an email from a former student, Suzanne Magin Mishkin, who had given a professional development workshop on Assets-Based Thinking. The concern is that all too often students with learning and attentional challenges—and the adults around them—focus on their deficits with little emphasis on their strengths, skills, and talents. The challenge is for students to appreciate their strengths and use them to mitigate weaknesses. A student with strong language skills and weak visual spatial skills can use verbal mediation, for example, talking through visual information such as charts, diagrams, maps, and graphs.

Assets-based thinking is a critical component of working with all students—those in ESS and those who are not. The goals for all students are to become independent, resilient, critical thinkers who are comfortable and articulate advocates for both themselves and others. We are proud that ESS students are fully integrated in their Upper School classes and extra-curricular activities. They are publication editors, SC officers, leaders in grade government, debate, mock trial, JSA, performers, and athletic stars. They take advanced classes and ECP classes, just like their typical peers.

How are these lofty goals achieved?

- **Self-awareness is key.** Knowing one's strengths and weaknesses—and using the former to enhance the latter—is empowering. Demystification (especially of medical terminology) can begin with the student's Education Plan, based on his/her psycho-educational evaluation. "Executive dysfunction" sounds scary, but understanding it as poor organization, which can include difficulties with time management, pacing, task initiation, cognitive flexibility, working memory, etc.—and then learning strategies that can overcome those issues builds self-confidence. For example, students with limited working memory (the brain's "counter-space") learn to begin exams by writing down memorized formulas as soon as tests are distributed, thus creating more "memory room."

- **Resilience:** We rarely grow when things go well; we grow from overcoming challenges and the occasional failure. Students learn that two wrong items on a three-point quiz, resulting in an "F" is not the end of the world. Carol Dweck's philosophy of a "growth mindset" drives the response we teach: tossing the quiz is a wasted opportunity; analyzing errors and knowing what to change will result in success on future quizzes.

- **Independence:** SSH classes assume that each year students achieve higher levels of independence. Learning specialists in middle school help students establish organization systems to keep track of assignments, electronic files, etc. They monitor missing work as well as offer additional scaffolding and interim due dates for long-term projects. They teach active study strategies (because "reading over my notes" is rarely sufficient to prepare for a test), and they encourage students to work with and learn from each other. As students progress into the next grade, they have grown in self-awareness and have absorbed skills and strategies that become habits, and there is a gradual fading of heavy support. By the time they begin high school, most students can confidently communicate with teachers, and they know when they need clarification. Self-regulation, including meeting goals, reflecting (and modifying behavior as a result), self-monitoring, and self-evaluation are skills closely related to achieving independence.

Taking pride in one's strengths develops a level of confidence that leads to further accomplishments—academic and otherwise. Fortunately, CESJDS offers a myriad of activities that develop students' talents, and using these opportunities as part of assets-based thinking ensures student success.