

Preschool Puzzler

By Fern Sanderson

The Preschool Puzzler is a monthly feature presented by the Jewish Preschool on Sardis. Fern Sanderson is the director of JPOS and a member of the national, state and local Associations for Education for Young Children, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and the National Jewish Early Childhood Network. She can be reached at jpsonsardis@earthlink.net.

Q: I want my preschooler to be prepared for kindergarten. I expressed this to her teacher. She told me that at this stage of development, focusing on a strong foundation in social and emotional skills comes before learning academics. I just don't understand this.

A. Let's think about the kinds of skills your daughter needs to be an effective learner. She has to be able to follow directions and

work well with others. She has to know how to stay on a task even when learning may be challenging. She needs to be able to complete a task, and she needs to want to learn and explore.

All of the attitudes and skills that your daughter needs to be a good student are the very same skills and beliefs that make up her social and emotional self. As she develops, she learns the skills she needs to work well with others. When she learns self-regulation, she can stick with a learning activity even if it becomes frustrating or if she makes mistakes. The development of initiative is important to keep the spark of learning alive and to give her the belief that she is able to learn and master new things. Problem-solving skills give her the basic tools she needs to learn how to decode words, figure out math



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problems and discover the world around her.

These social and emotional skills are as necessary to the learning tasks as the tasks themselves. Once your daughter knows how to work alongside others, persists through challenging tasks, has confidence that she can and will learn and how to go about tackling problem, she will be armed and ready to engage in learning experiences. Before teaching academics, we need to make sure she has the social and emotional skills she needs to learn content. Social and emotional teaching is always the step preceding more academic teaching.

Learning does not take place in a vacuum. Learning involves the whole child — physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively. A child must have the prerequisite social and emotional skills and attitudes to be a successful learner. ☆

K-8 Model Wins Out

By Jessica Sammis

Earlier this year, *Educational Leadership*, a monthly publication of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), dedicated an entire issue to the social and academic development of adolescents. It seems that "twens," ages 10-14, have been caught in the middle of an educational debate that has been going on for decades. One of the most heated debates that has recently resurfaced is over the grade level structure of the school.

On one side are those who endorse the middle school concept — a theory that separates grades 6-8 from the rest of the academic world and focuses primarily on a developmentally based curriculum of social and academic growth. Groups such as the National Middle School Association (NMSA) are strong advocates for this style of teaching for the middle level learner. On the other side, the K-8 reformers want to put twens back into elementary school. They feel that the elementary environment is more personal and protected and provides a more intellectual curriculum. A coherent curriculum, strong leadership, result-based accountability, and sound discipline are cornerstones of the K-8 model.

Both sides make compelling arguments for their style of teaching twens, but recent independent studies in Milwaukee, Baltimore, and Philadelphia all

show concrete evidence that supports K-8 reform. While each study used its own measures and methods of comparison, they all reported increased academic, social, and extracurricular achievement in students who attended K-8 schools over those who attended separate elementary and middle schools. Two of the studies continued their observations throughout high school as well and found that the K-8 students were accepted at better high schools and were more academically successful there.

The Barbara and Jerry Levin Jewish Middle School and the Charlotte Jewish Day School have not been ignoring this research. Over the past two years, the schools have been considering the strengths and weaknesses of their current, separate models. Ultimately, the benefits of the K-8 model won the battle, and the two schools decided to proceed with plans to merge. And finally last month, after more than two years of research and planning, the boards of the two schools agreed to the plan.

Of course, there is still a lot to be accomplished that will take time. Therefore, the merger will become official for the 2008-2009 school year. In the meantime, the schools will continue to act as two separate institutions, but with the added benefit of knowing what the future holds for their merger. It's an exciting time for Jewish education in Charlotte.

References: Beane, J., & Lipka, R. (2006). "Guess Again: Will Changing the Grades Save Middle-Level Education?" *Educational Leadership*, 63, 26-30.

If you would like more information about the Barbara and Jerry Levin Jewish Middle School or its merger with the Charlotte Jewish Day School, please contact Jessica Sammis at 704-366-4558 or jsammis@cjdschool.org. ☆

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Laurie F. Berzack, MSW

Passover at CJP

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"It was hidden in a book, but we found it," he said.

Morah Elka and teachers led each seder, telling the story using songs, movements and plush toys to represent each plague. Students tried matzah and jelly, cream cheese and jelly, butter and tuna. They also had horseradish,

charoset, hard boiled eggs and other traditional foods.

So with all the activities and excitement, what was their favorite part of Passover?

For four-year-old Nicole Hoffman in Miss Kim's class, the answer was simple.

"Eating." ☆

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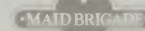
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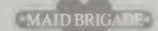
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