

## Schools

# Hebrew Language Program Shows Progress at CJDS

By Mariashi Groner, director, CJDS

I received the following e-mail from a parent in our school and I began to reflect on the journey we have taken to bring the Hebrew language to the students in our school.

"Last week, my daughter Mackenzie had her friend Emily over to play. From a distance I could see them deep in conversation, full of smiles and having such fun together. I couldn't quite make out what was producing these ear-to-ear grins so I nonchalantly made my way over closer to them ... close enough to hear them talking and singing in Hebrew. Well, you can imagine the smile that came across my face when I



Mackenzie

overheard this ... these two first-graders so comfortably communicating (and having fun doing it!) in Hebrew. It was a poignant moment ... watching these girls carry their lessons outside the classroom so confidently.

"Now if I could only understand what they were saying!"

As I reflect on progress we have made in Hebrew language instruction, I can't help but remember some of the strategic goals we set ten or 15 years ago. We dreamed that the Hebrew teachers would be able to speak only Hebrew in class and to expect a reasonable amount of ability to converse with students in Hebrew. It seemed like an impossible expectation, since the time allotted to Hebrew studies — including prayer, holidays, history, Hebrew reading, Hebrew writing and language — is only two hours in grades 1-5. In addition, many of our families cannot reinforce what is taught during the day.

A whole-language program was developed for the Hebrew language for only first grade. We were one of the first schools to get on board because we were thirsty for a child-centered curriculum for the study of Hebrew and Judaism for our students. It took ten more years for the second- to fifth-grade pieces to be published.

It has now been two years that all of CJDS is experiencing a daily dose of music, art, conversation, holidays, Torah stories all in Hebrew for two hours a day, ten hours a week. You can actually walk into a classroom and hear only Hebrew. The children are following instructions all in Hebrew. When sharing news each day, they are not hesitant to use their Hebrew skills to express a complex thought, emotion or opinion.

As a day school graduate, I remember taking Hebrew my whole life and the only sentences I was willing to try were simple ones. I couldn't believe my ears when I walked in on the fourth-grade class discussing the political differences between Elizabeth Dole and Kay Hagan. Wow!

Although I had videos of classes and written work that demonstrated proficiency, the story of Michael Silver, a fifth-grader who transitioned to his neighborhood public school this year, hammered home the realization that we have

accomplished what we set out to do.

On the second day of school, the principal of Elizabeth Lane Elementary School called Karen Silver, Michael's mother, to tell her of Michael's great assistance. The principal said, "I had to call you to tell you what a help your son was today. We have a little boy in our first grade who just moved to Charlotte from Israel. He did not understand or speak any English. We couldn't communicate with him and it was clearly upsetting him. Out of desperation



Emily

I went into the fifth-grade class, the oldest class in the school, and asked if anyone spoke Hebrew. Your son's hand shot up and I asked him if he could help me communicate with this child. Your son helped me throughout the day and was able to give us some guidance and comfort to this child."



Michael Silver

How thrilling that our students have the ability to learn the language that is a part of their heritage and can actually use it in a modern day setting, to help another. What more could we ask for? ☆

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