

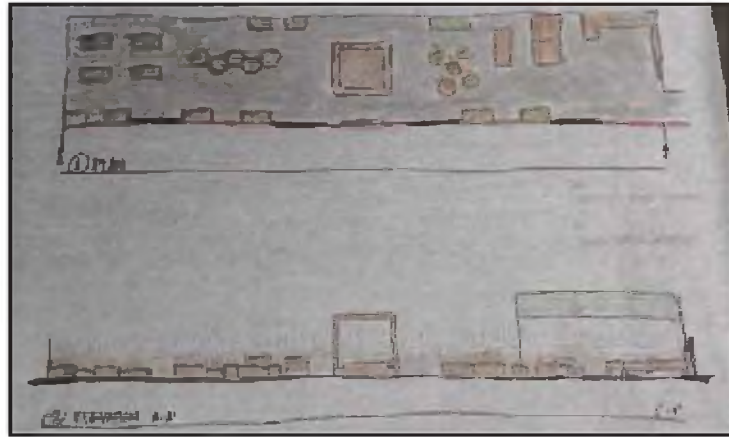
Outdoor Learning Space at CJP

By Brooke Amo

At The Charlotte Jewish Preschool we are working to continually strengthen our religious connections, improve on our practice and explore learning opportunities that are best practice for our children. It is essential to always keep in mind our mission and teach Judaism as the foundation for all of our learning, and not as a special, simply a holiday, or in isolated context. As we make sure that we are teaching through "Jewish lens" we have to challenge ourselves, and look for even more opportunities to organically evolve a Jewish identity within our children.

As some of you may know in the back of The Don and Bobbi Bernstein Education building where CJP and Temple Beth El's religious school reside, there is a desolate concrete open space. This space was once used as a one's and two's playground before The Sandra and Leon Levine Playground was built. Now that we have a beautiful playground for all aged to go to, it was time to look into other outdoor learning opportunities for our children. This year thanks to our Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte's Impact and Innovation Grant, along with our Annual Fund dollars we are going to begin to build a CJP learning garden (name not yet determined).

A CJP garden will provide a secure and loving environment for our students to explore God's cre-



Bobbie Mabe's sketch of the upcoming changes in the garden.

ations. Students will not only learn about, but will also be active partners with God in growing fruits and vegetables – with and without soil. They will learn healthy eating habits and have increased opportunities for development of physical and social skills.

Furthermore, childhood memories surrounding contact with nature involve a deep sensory imprint of texture, smell, color, sound, and taste. These spaces in nature imply a sense of freedom and serenity in which the natural elements (including the weather) present both complexity and the unexpected. We began with the garden as a place for wonder and the unexpected. As stewards of the earth, working beside their peers and adults, the children in

the garden construct a sustainable future for themselves and their community.

CJP's overarching goals for the garden:

1. Students will learn about Judaism and the natural world around them – this will be achieved continuously through weekly lessons of formal science and Judaic education and informal exposure in the garden.

2. To create an outdoor student-centered learning environment that is enriching, engaging, and facilitates our mission - this will be overseen by Bobbie Mabe as she works with our designer and constructor in building the garden.

3. Students will learn science concepts - this will be achieved in conjunction with learning about Judaism, as we have intertwined

both concepts in our curriculum.

4. Furthermore, one of our goals is to instill a love for the environment in our students and to encourage their continued participation in other gardens located around Shalom Park. By starting our students early with their love of and participation in nurturing the environment we aim to encourage increased participation in Tikken Olam and Ba'al Tashcheet at Shalom Park and in any community through the course of their lives.

Bobbie Mabe joined our CJP team of highly-qualified educators as the Science teacher this year. Not only has she demonstrated her love of teaching as well as horticulture, but has developed the vision for this garden. Some of the items you can expect to see in our garden beginning mid-February are: more box gardens, child-size picnic tables, root view gardens, sensory garden, waterfall tables, bean teepee, a learning stage, a storage shed, pollinator gardens and much more. Please see Bobbie's rough sketch herein.

It is through the CJP garden that we will be able to concretize the link between Judaism and science for our students. The garden will act as a spiraling curriculum as students as young as 12 months and all the way through our Pre-K program will be learning something new and more complex each time they attend science class.

Moreover, our Jewish holiday's

observances will be enhanced by a CJP garden – our bean tent will be a perfect sukkah for the students to dwell inside, and students will have an opportunity to pick fruit that they have grown for a *shalach manot* basket at Purim. While working together to learn the joy of these various Jewish traditions, students will connect meaningfully with each other and our Shalom Park community.

As you can see and hear we are very excited to share this news with the community. In the near future we will be looking for ways to get the children, parents, teachers and any community members involved with creating, personalizing, and sustaining this great learning opportunity for our children. ☆



Charlotte Jewish
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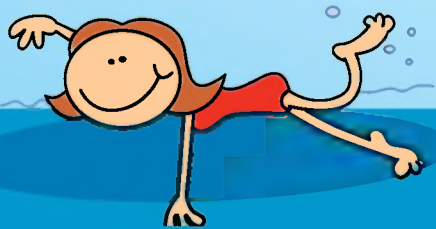
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