

# **CJA 2010 YEAR END REVIEW – by Ben Karmel**

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## **1. Vision**

Each school year is organized to reflect the school's vision, mission and core values.

I believe that each of our students must be challenged by their teachers to the best of their ability. And, as a positive, nurturing learning community we all collaborate to set everybody up to succeed: students, teachers, administration, parents and the greater community. I firmly believe in the triangular model of education that relies on the student, school and parents working closely together within a respectful atmosphere.

One only need review the life stories of CJA alumni featured this year in the CJA newsletters to realize that this school indeed produces graduates with an excellent education and are productive contributors to society.

It is not sufficient that our graduates become successful mathematicians, doctors, lawyers, etc when they leave our school - I firmly believe that we are still riding the coattails of a platinum age for Diaspora Jewry. How many of us can recall Jewish Diaspora life prior to the rebirth of Israel?

No matter what Jews in the Diaspora believe, all of us continue to need a very strong Israel - and Israel needs to rely on a Diaspora of strong, unified Jews: Jews who feel sufficiently comfortable and capable to verbally advocate for the state of Israel and can make an intelligent, compelling argument. I believe that we must educate our students to be proud and confident Jews who understand the values of interfaith dialogue but do not rely solely on this. Jews who are without fear and shame and are not apologetic, not for being Jewish within a large host non-Jewish population and not for being seen as a link to Israel.

Therefore, in my vision, we are not a school for Jewish children. The CJA has been, and continues to be, a Jewish school. This is what attracted me to this school from day one - to have the privilege of teaching in the Judaic faculty. Our students do not sink down in their desks in high school when the subject of the

holocaust arises, or when they realize that their high school teachers are ill-equipped or choose not to teach the subject in the Alberta Social Studies curriculum. Our Alumni are not shy to face off against opponents of Jews, whether Jews live in Canada or in Israel.

As a community Jewish day school located in Western Canada in 2010, we have our inherent challenges in serving our small Jewish community - to maintain excellence in providing a stellar dual curriculum for all families. To this we encourage teachers to continue to learn and parents, as their children's primary educators, to support our teachers.

The change process cannot simply rely on theory or ideas. Effective change is rooted in a very slow, messy, painful and costly implementation process. Effective change is based on many feet going in one direction. That is never easy. Therefore, the steps must be considered carefully and they must tread upon a sturdy, common vision based on buy-in. My vision for this school is long term to make it the very best school for not only the children of today, but also their children.

## **2. 2009/10 Improvement Plan Goals and Achievements**

The goals set out at the beginning of this year's School Improvement Plan included:

### **Preschool Program Enhancement:**

Teachers met regularly with their consultant, Patti Aknin to work collaboratively at enhancing the Preschool program.

### **Judaic Curriculum Revision:**

Following recommendations from the Judaic Program Evaluation, Shoshanna Kirmayer, Associate Principal, Judaic studies, led staff in the first phase of revising the school's Judaic Curriculum, continuing to refine the Jewish Holiday Program.

### **Self Paced Learning in Math, Language Arts, Hebrew**

Our staff moved forward providing individualized instruction with two computer programs that serve our dual curriculum:

Math and Language Arts teachers (grades 2 - 9) and their students continued to use the self-paced learning tutorial software program SuccessMaker in class and at home. Teachers and families reported significant achievements in these areas.

The school is happy to offer home use of SuccessMaker for a very reasonable fee. We encourage families to take advantage of the summer program as well to maintain skills, close concept gaps and progress at their own pace for September.

### **Hebrew language**

Many students worked at school on their own Hebrew language ability level, at their own pace with the Rosetta Stone computer program.

### **AISI (Alberta Initiative for School Improvement): Tikkun Olam**

AISI is an Alberta Government program providing funding for participating schools with approved plans. Our last three-year cycle plan was inquiry based learning.

This year CJA staff participated in our third AISI Conference in Edmonton. Our team successfully presented our projects for inquiry based learning implementation in grades one, four, six and nine. Our presenters received very positive feedback from the audience and directly from the Alberta Independent Schools Association, AISI Program Director, Ary de Moor.

This year our school commenced its new three-year AISI cycle that embraces Service Learning for Tikkun Olam. Our goal is to provide a good understanding to students about Service Learning. Our students continue to learn to identify and embrace very worthwhile Tikkun Olam projects within an environment that encourages Menschleket:

In our newsletter we recognize students who participate in their own Tzedakah or Tikkun Olam. What occurred in the spectrum of service learning and Tikkun Olam at the CJA this year?

- At *Rosh Hashanah*, Junior High students baked one hundred honey cakes under parent volunteer leadership and prepared packages for distribution through Jewish family services.
- As an on-going food distribution project throughout the year for the needy, students collected food for Miriam's well in celebration of Shavuot. All classes collected food bank donations.
- Each grade sponsored specific, vital equipment for our school wide Magen David Adom service project, raising enough money to purchase the items. Our school exceeded our goal in this tzedakah project. While we had committed to raise \$900 we raised more than \$1200.
- Grades Two, Three and Eight students visited the Beverly Nursing Centre at various times over the year celebrating Shabbat and holidays with the seniors.
- Students participated in the Terry Fox Walk and actively supported "Toonies For Terry", fundraising and raising awareness for cancer research. This year, for every \$500 raised by students, a staff member shaved their head.

Students raised \$1855.83, some staff members shaved their heads, and another dyed her hair – all in front of a very enthusiastic student assembly.

- Student Council initiated financial assistance to a Haiti relief fund. By leading off a donation of \$500, the parent association then matched that amount. The general school community also raised an additional \$487.
- Grade Eight students led the school in collecting new or gently used items for a White Elephant sale at a Calgary elementary school, allowing people with little money to buy gifts. Then they visited this school and taught students in Kindergarten and Grades one and two about Chanukah.
- Grade Nine students worked at the Calgary Interfaith Food Bank as part of their Community Service elective.
- Grade Five initiated their own Service Learning project “Pennies for Peace” to raise funds for a school in Afghanistan.
- Many Grade Five students elected to be mediators. They learned conflict resolution training and used their new strategies to assist younger students to resolve playground issues.

### **3. Student Achievements**

Our teachers work hard at setting individual students up for success. They believe that these sensational learning opportunities are very significant for student academic development: these included math contests for Grades Four through Nine, Science Fair for Grades Five through Nine, and Grade Seven Jewish Social Studies Jeopardy Championships.

**Math competitions** from Ontario universities and the University of Calgary are contests consisting of progressive, higher order thinking questions.

Our math department uses the University of Windsor’s annual contests in Grades Four, Five and Six. In Junior High the University of Waterloo’s annual contests consist of two competitions: The Gauss in Grades Seven and Eight and The Pascal in Grade Nine. The Pascal is a high stakes, prestigious competition

**School Science Fair**, with the exception of Grade Seven, is optional for Grades Five through Nine. It provides superior enrichment and inquiry opportunities. Students also learn how to present their work and in the process also become very articulate.

A Calgary Herald interview carried in our June 9 newsletter featured Alumnus Todd Kemp from the Class of 1992. A math professor at M.I.T., Todd credits the

Calgary Jewish Academy with providing him regular opportunities to showcase his scientific projects, and that he was most encouraged by a combination of teachers with whom he is still in touch.

This year was the 49th annual Calgary Youth Science Fair with almost 1,000 participants. The CJA had 24 entries from Grades Five through Nine and received three major awards, twenty medals, and two honorable mentions.

## **4. Student Engagements**

### **Athletics:**

Under the leadership of their dedicated volunteer coaches, Junior High athletes competed admirably against a number of schools in the Separate School Board in four different sports teams: cross country, volleyball, basketball and badminton.

In reviewing CJA girl's basketball history, we believe this is the first time ever our senior girls took home a trophy! Junior High students won gold and bronze at the badminton city finals

Internally students competed on teams in assorted activities and junior house leagues for Grades Four and Five, and house leagues for Grades Six through Nine.

### **Other Activities:**

Throughout the year teachers continued to engage students outside of athletics and beyond the classroom by volunteering their time at noon and after school in a diverse menu of interesting activities.

### **Noon time clubs and activities included:**

Chess club Grades 1- 9

Spelling bee Grades 1- 9

Games club Grades 4 - 6

Reading club Grades 1- 6

Scrapbooking club Grades 1- 9

Knitting club Grades 3 - 9

Homework help for Junior High

**After school clubs and activities included:**

Homework help Grades 1- 6  
Sports team practices and games

**The CJA's first Einstein Day (also called 'PI' day):**

Einstein Day was celebrated by students from Grades One through Eight by engaging in math activities throughout the day in the gym.

**"The Joy of Yiddish Weeks" Program**

The school piloted a new approach to Yiddish instruction this year "The Joy of Yiddish Weeks" Program. This replaced the previous Yiddish program. For two solid weeks our students learned Yiddish and East European Jewish culture through various activities including songs, dances, plays, movies and guest speakers. This culminated in students presenting a very successful and enjoyable Yiddish evening for all families and the community.

**Art Awareness and Appreciation at The CJA:**

The CJA Art Gallery is located outside the David Waterman Lecture Theatre. The art collections are arranged by CJA parent volunteer Mr. Simon Wroot and our art teacher, Ms. Alice van Mil (Helwig), both talented and accomplished artists. This year the gallery boasted several spectacular displays of art.

**New Junior High "Lunch and Learn With The Rabbi" Program**

This Program featured Rabbi Ross from The Kollel and Rabbi Voss Altman from the Temple B'Nai Tikvah. The Rabbis presented ideas and lead group discussions about Jewish values and ideals, an integral part of the Jewish people.

**Celebrating the Holidays**

School-wide celebrations included:

- Latke lunches for the whole school
- Purim parade and carnival
- Gr. 1-9 Passover model Seder and preschool Passover Seder
- Yom Hashoah program was located for the first time at the Holocaust Memorial site at the Jewish Community Centre. Two assemblies were led by grade 6 and some junior high students, one for grades 4-5 and the other for grades 6-8.
- Yom Ha-azmaot Falafel Lunch
- Yom Hazikaron Commemoration Ceremony for grades 1-8 was at The CJA, dedicated to machal to honor Jewish and non Jewish volunteers from various countries who fought alongside of Israeli fighters during Israel's War of Independence.

## **For Parents:**

### **Focusing on student personal and social development**

The school guidance psychologist, Yvonne Fleutcher presented a parent evening to learn about what actually constitutes bullying versus what does developmentally appropriate play look like in early elementary children.

Administration met with Grade Six families to hear about their expectations for a Junior High experience.

Administration, teachers, junior high and high school students presented a Junior High information session for Grade Six students.

## **5. Off Site Activities**

Throughout the school year our staff captured a diverse variety of rich curricular linked learning opportunities for students. Many of these were through creative experiential learning activities for every grade from Nursery through Grade Nine. Some of these were off site activities either local in Calgary, deeper into the province, and internationally to Washington D.C. in Grade Eight and Israel in Grade Nine.

Whether it is Junior Kindergarten visiting local fire stations in support of their Community Helpers unit, a Grade Three Tu Bishvat Seder, Grade Five travelling to Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump in conjunction with their Native Study unit, all off site activities are linked to the curriculum.

Probably the most symbolic of the off-site activities is the Grade Nine Israel Experience. I would like to share with you some of this year's Grade Nine parent's comments about the trip:

*"it is the ultimate icing on the cake of CJA years and a privilege for all of our children to experience this wonderful trip together culminating all their years of Jewish education and study at The CJA."*

*"having all the knowledge from their Judaic and Bible Studies classes so fresh in their minds while visiting all of these places and artifacts is profoundly meaningful as it comes to life for our kids. As well, their Hebrew classes completely prepared them to read, write, and converse in the language of the land."*

*"CJA's curriculum has done an outstanding job of preparing my daughter. Her knowledge of Jewish history, both ancient and modern has deepened her understanding of what Eretz Israel really means to us. The students' sense of Jewish identity is greatly strengthened by this trip."*

One parent was uncertain about their child's preparation ....prior to the trip and said: *"after hearing comments from the students' tour guide regarding the kids' superior knowledge, it became abundantly clear that our school has done a tremendous job getting the students prepared for their trip of a lifetime."*

## **6. Program Evaluations**

The Calgary Jewish Academy regularly evaluates our instructional programs to ensure their quality, provide professional development, and mentoring opportunities for Staff. I believe that our school is virtually alone at instituting this process of regular cyclical instructional Program Evaluations.

This year, our Nursery and Junior Kindergarten Programs were evaluated by Dr. Susan Ditchburn, our Physical Education Program was evaluated by Mr. Dwayne Sheehan, and our Gifted Education Program was evaluated by Dr. Janneke Frank.

## **7. Next Year**

Looking to next year in terms of school improvement plans, the school has already closely analyzed and will continue to scrutinize valuable information gleaned from the recent Gifted Program Evaluation. Like other program evaluations, it provides the Administration and Staff with a great opportunity in the change process.

The Administration looks forward to implementing planning that is reflective of the Program Evaluation. Foremost is the Administration's decision to enhance Differentiated Instruction widely throughout the school. To achieve this objective in a timely manner, we have already commenced the process of engaging in dedicated long term Professional Development relevant to this Program Evaluation, and like the other Program Evaluations, in acquiring on-going expert consultation and mentoring for the coming school year.

We look forward to working in partnership with parents in the 2010-2011 school year on the implementation of these plans - whether in supporting their children, or working together with them on a Committee tasked with constructing a concrete position paper that captures the school's stakeholders' collective vision defining and providing Gifted Education tailored to the CJA school setting.

With eyes opened to challenging economical times....our Executive is wisely making pragmatic strides on the school's strategic financial development.

This year we hired Lisa Thomson as Director of Development, and together with her Advisory Committee, she planned and executed the school's first and successful Annual Fundraising Campaign.

A number of independent schools are facing challenging enrolment. Kim Chulsky, our Director of Admissions, together with the Administration, Staff and Executive, has worked very hard over this year at leading the school in its recruitment and retention plans. She has been successful in bringing in new families to the school at the youngest ages.

**8. Closing remarks** We are indebted to many: First to a dedicated Staff of professionals, their loyalty to CJA families is witnessed on a daily basis in all capacities and levels of our entire professional team, whether Support Staff, Teaching Staff or Administration.

Also to our Executive and its Committees run by seemingly tireless, devoted parent volunteers. I am personally in awe of individual Executive members who make themselves accessible and available for consultation whenever needed, as I am mindful of the challenges they face with their own family and jobs, and by their resolve to stay the course committed to The CJA.

This, together with a collective professional perspective for multi-tiered risk management for the school, is crucial to effective school governance and to maintaining the sustainability of the Calgary Jewish Academy.

Thank you to four dedicated Executive members who are stepping down from the executive:

1. Harriet Glazer - Treasurer over this school year.
2. Joel Grotsky - Fundraising co-chair for the last three years.
3. Beth Ordman – Vice President External, who has served 7 years in various roles on the Executive.
4. Ellen Magidson – Publicity Co-chair for the past four years.

As our Grade Nine class becomes CJA Alumni from the depths of their very articulate souls, I believe that they definitely realize the significance of their time spent at the CJA. As tangible proof of the value they place in the school they collectively purchased a leaf on The CJA “Tree of Life”.

This year’s very effective and successful Student Council led the entire student population in creating a 2010 “Time Capsule”. The 2010 Graduating Class lend a fresh example of CJA students who are able to apply with confidence to secondary schools and to be embraced not only by Calgary’s good quality public high schools but also are sought after by private university prep high schools of their choice. These CJA Graduates are very in tune with their roots, savvy about the value of the education they possess to date.

I want to thank every one – students, staff, parents and Executive - as we end the school year. I wish you all a safe and restful summer vacation, and look forward to our work together on the new year.