

Specialized Learning Communities

The Hebrew Academy, with funding from a large donor and expert guidance from Dr. Megan Carlson and Rabbi Yitzchok Newman, is implementing a new, rigorous and engaging program which challenges all students, particularly those who test highly on standardized tests, to exceed previous expectations of performance. Specialized Learning Communities (SLCs) fit into an educational system which is often referred to as "schools within a school."

The primary purpose of our program is to create more specialized learning environments, focused on students' aptitudes and interests, so to establish an even more rich and engaging learning experience for the students. Some SLCs may require specific test scores or essays from the students in order to participate in them. Each SLC will often share the same teachers and student members throughout the program, and much of their assessments will be based on real-life learning and production. The teachers have common planning time to allow them to develop interdisciplinary projects and best discuss and plan for each students' learning needs and academic progress.

As a further explanation of this new learning environment, Rebecca Jacobson, of Innovative Educators CA, said, "Hebrew Academy is deeply immersed in training and planning that will ensure the successful implementation of an academically stronger middle school program beginning in the 2014-15 school year. As we examine the needs of our students and families we plan to create



Specialized Learning Communities in the middle school program."

SLCs provide an environment in which a core group of teachers and other adults within the school know the needs, interests, and aspirations of each student well, closely monitor his or her progress, and provide the academic and other support he or she needs to succeed. The goal is that the communities provide consistent support, rigor and relevance for targeted groups of students.

Research has shown that small SLCs help students develop and maintain more positive relationships with each other and with teachers. In middle school, we believe this program will help our students develop and strengthen their social skills and sense of community.

Additional research has shown that students can achieve more and perform at a higher level when we meet their needs of personalized instruction. By focusing on the individual needs of our students and creating flexible mixed-grade small groups, according to identified strengths and weaknesses, we can better provide instruction that will help each student reach their highest potential.

Furthermore, students and teachers will be able to focus on deeper-level critical think-

ing and research skills as the teachers will have the flexibility to work closely across disciplines and implement interdisciplinary projects and themes.

Direct instruction will continue to take place as needed throughout the day, however, the format of SLCs will allow teachers to target their instruction more carefully to the specific needs of each student. Differentiated instructional strategies will help teachers meet students where they are and challenge them to expand their learning. Teachers can focus on specific study skills, scaffolding, and multiple intelligences to ensure students are consistently engaged.

In addition, SLCs will allow our teachers to develop and carry out thematic and cross-curricular projects that will enhance learning and engagement. As project-based learning is implemented, teachers will be able to involve students in authentic, experiential, student-directed learning that helps them stay engaged and focused.

Finally, the new national Common Core standards emphasize depth rather than breadth, and as we align our instruction and assessment to these standards, we want to emphasize the critical and analytical thinking we know our students can perform. Smaller grouping and targeted instruction should help each student develop these higher-level thinking skills.

If you are interested in learning more about this new exciting academic endeavor, please contact Dr. Megan Carlson at mcarlson@hacds.org.

Soccer at the Hebrew Academy



Our fall soccer season ended with a fantastic Dad's Soccer Contest and a delicious kosher barbecue. There were more than forty children, ages 5-12 years old, who partook in this amazing Sunday Soccer League.

The League was founded by the Hollanders and run completely by committed and capable volunteers. We are happy to announce that

we have now partnered with AYSO, who will be helping us begin a Sunday-only AYSO league in Huntington Beach, at our school. You won't want to miss this opportunity.

If you are interested in having your children participate in the spring league, beginning in March, please contact Dr. Megan Carlson at mcarlson@hacds.org and we will get you on the list. Your children do not have to attend The Hebrew Academy, they must want to play soccer and you must be able to commit to Sunday soccer games.

New Preschool Library



The Preschool is proud to announce the opening of their very own library designed especially for children ages 2-6. Thanks to some very creative and passionate parents, the preschool has earned the money to make this dream a reality.

The planning and construction has already begun. The library will include outstanding literature geared toward toddlers and parents, as well as cozy built-in couch-

es with pillows, a readers' theater area and more!

The library is scheduled to be completed at the end of March. We are planning to have the Grand Opening in April. Stay tuned for more information. We will be hosting Tot Shabbats and story time for all to enjoy.

If you are interested in helping with this wonderful endeavor, please contact our award-winning Director, Chanie Perlemuter, at cperlemuter@hacds.org or 714-898-0051.

Attention New Mommies



Our next session of Mommy and Me will be held on Thursday, February 6th at our Preschool. The environment is fun, loving and comfortable, creating a network of friends and mentors to help you raise your darling little person.

The classes are held every Thursday from 9:30 am-11:30 am, and are only \$10

per class. This is a wonderful opportunity for mothers to ask questions, share experiences, exchange ideas and, most importantly, enjoy a place where you and your child will connect with other moms and children. The Hebrew Academy Mommy and Me is where you will start lifelong friendships - guaranteed! Please feel free to drop-in, we'd love to meet you!