



## From Rabbi Mitchel Malkus, Head of School

If there is one academic characteristic for which CESJDS is known near and far, among Jewish schools and independent and public schools, it is that our learning community is both exceptionally rigorous and outstanding. In this edition of *The Lions' Roar*, we share a look into our math and science programs in each division, as well as the view from one of our graduates.

When we look at the educational landscape, CESJDS shines when it comes to math and science. Even prior to the pandemic, there has been a decline in K-12 student achievement as measured on assessment tests for schools across the country. Locally, there was a sharp drop in standardized test scores in math that followed remote learning in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). Then in August 2023, MCPS reported that students' test scores have also plummeted in science. While other independent schools do not report academic scores, CESJDS student scores on the assessments in math and science show strong achievement which has been consistent from before, through, and now beyond the pandemic.

In this edition, Jennifer Rittberg, our Lower School Math and Scheduling Coordinator, writes about growth mindset and the Lower School math program by sharing a number of examples from different classrooms. Ethan Merlin, our Middle School Math Department Chair, shares his reflections on changes to middle school math over the years and where our middle school stands with curriculum and teaching approach today. In reviewing our science program at the High School level, Aileen Goldstein, High School Assistant Principal, explores the student publication, *The Bohr-Franklin Science Journal*, which showcases the scientific writing and research of CESJDS students and cultivates an appreciation for scientific inquiry, learning, and growth in our community. Last, Miriam Minsk '17, shares how she was inspired to pursue a rigorous eight-year dual MD/PhD program at the University of California San Francisco because of one of her CESJDS science teachers and the background she gained at our school.

I know you will enjoy learning about the exceptional math and science teaching and learning that is taking place currently at CESJDS as we meet our mission to engage students in an exemplary and inspiring Jewish and general studies education.



## SCHOOL

- The **Varsity Softball team** won the PVAC Championship.
- The **Varsity Baseball team** came in first place in the PVAC League standings.
- The **Boys Varsity Volleyball team** won the PVAC Championship.
- **The Lion's Tale** was one of 16 hybrid news magazines to receive the Columbia Scholastic Press Association's Gold Crown, one of the highest scholastic journalism awards in the country.
- The **JDS Dimensions Yearbook** was featured in the Jostens *Look Book*, a publication that showcases the best yearbook design work from schools across the country.
- The **CESJDS Margolius Family Debate Team** placed third in the Montgomery County Debate League.
- The **CESJDS Center for Excellence and Engagement in Jewish History (CEEJH)**, in partnership with Jewish National Fund-USA, hosted a Summer Institute for Middle and High School educators focused on Israel, Zionism, and the Jewish World to plan curricular units and share methods, tips, and best practices in teaching Jewish History.
- **CESJDS** received an A+ WellEducated School rating for promoting a healthy school community, earning a \$2,500 scholarship award by the AIMS Health Plan WellEducated Wellness Program.
- **CESJDS**, together with Edmund Burke School, hosted a Washington Area Independent School College Fair with representatives from 95 colleges and universities.
- The **cast and crew of *Matilda, JR.*** raised \$250 for Save A Heart!
- **Make-A-Wish Mid-Atlantic** held a Lower School concert with KidzBop for **Noa Briton** (Grade 2) at the CESJDS Lower School. Noa's wish was the 1000th wish granted for the organization.

## STUDENT

- **3 CESJDS students** were inducted into the Arabic Honor Society and **11 CESJDS students** were inducted into the Hispanic Honor Society.
- **Elie Arkin** (Grade 9), **Ori Ben Nun** (Grade 9), and **Hadriel Dayanim** (Grade 9) participated in the Maimonides Moot Beit Din, an international competition where students are given a case study and asked to create a solution using ancient and contemporary Jewish texts.
- **Aliza Bellas** (Grade 11) and **Adam Bachrach** (Grade 11) were elected to the BBYO's DC Council Board.
- **Aliza Bellas** (Grade 11) represented the DC region at this year's American Jewish Committee (AJC) Global Forum in Israel.
- **Micah Blay** (Grade 9), **David Spieler** (Grade 9), **Micah Harkavy** (Grade 9), and **Jonah Appelbaum** (Grade 9) won first place in the high school competition for "Battle of the Bands" from Bach to Rock.

- **Abigail Chesman** (Grade 11), **Maddie Polonsky** (Grade 12), and **Caleb Horwitz** (Grade 10) had their work selected for Representative Jamie Raskin's 2023 Congressional Art Competition for high school students and will be part of a VisArts gallery exhibition.
- **Shiri Cohen** (Grade 12) received a nomination for Best Actress from the Brandon Victor Dixon Awards for her role as Dolly Levi in *Hello Dolly*, the Joan and Marvin Rosenberg High School Musical.
- JDS students participated in a county-wide art contest encouraging Montgomery County residents to recycle. **Adi Kaplow** (Grade 5) won 2nd place, **Talia Hosid** (Grade 5) won 3rd place, and **Shai Blecher** (Grade 4), **Hava Kane** (Grade 4), **David Pery** (Grade 4), and **Yoav Karo** (Grade 4), and **Shoshana Jacobsohn** (Grade 5) received Honorable Mention.
- **Andrew Lefkowitz** (Grade 12) received the PVAC Player of the Year recognition.
- **Stella Muzin** (Grade 11) and **Gili Schisterman** (Grade 12) led a team as part of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Student Visionaries of the Year campaign and raised over \$85,000.
- **Emily (Mali) Osofsky** (Grade 9) came in fourth place at the Dr. Shimshon Isseroff USA *Chidon Ha'Tanach* National Finals.
- **Jessica Rosenberg** (Grade 11) received a gold medal for her dance solo at the United States Tournament of Dance National Championships and first place champion for her solo in the category of musical theater dance at the Starpower Talent competition.
- **Gabriella (Gabi) Simon** (Grade 12) won the 2023 JTS *Ahavat Torah* Award.
- **Nathan Szubin** (Grade 11) was featured in *The Washington Post* for his track achievements.
- **Alana Udell** (Grade 11) performed with the National Philharmonic Orchestra and Strathmore's Children's Concert Chorus.

## FACULTY

- **Rabba Aliza Libman Baronofsky**, Middle School Math & Jewish Text Teacher, published a paper on "Halachic Issues Facing Non-Binary Jews" in *Maharat's Keren Journal*.
- **Michal Friedman**, 2nd Grade General Studies Teacher, finished her fellowship in the Legacy Heritage Teacher Leadership Fellowship at Brandeis University. Her work was on "Finding the Middot! Bringing our School's Core Values to the Forefront of the Student Experience."
- **Rabbi Mitchel Malkus**, Head of School, and **Rachel Bergstein**, Director of the Center for Excellence and Engagement in Jewish History & High School Jewish History Teacher, participated in a Prizmah Podcast on the importance of Jewish history in a Jewish education.
- **Dr. Lisa Vardi**, High School Principal, attended Harvard University's Achieving Excellence: Leadership Development Institute for Principals.

## ALUMNI

- **Adam Bashein '89** was honored by the Mikvah Emunah Society for his volunteer efforts.
- **Oliver Ferber '23** was featured in the 2023 ESPN Documentary, "Running on Faith."
- **Arielle Goldman '07** is starring in Zarina Shea's play *Let's Call Her Patty* with Lincoln Center Theater.
- **Shira Kobren '02** received the 2023 Robert M. Sherman Young Pioneers Award, which recognizes Jewish Educators in the Greater New York area who push the boundaries in Jewish Education and make significant impacts in their communities.
- **Max Levitt '07**, Founder and Executive Director of Leveling the Playing Field, received the Benjamin Ourisman Memorial Award for Civic Achievement.
- **Deborah Reichmann '89** is currently exhibiting at The Stone Tower Gallery, presenting "Rhetoric in Stone," a retrospective exhibition of stone sculptures that traces the language of Deborah's life.
- **Rachel Simmons '92**, **Joel Sunshine '03**, **Rachel Cohen '06**, **Shira Winston '13**, **Max Smith '13**, **2000 Varsity Softball**, and **Ethan Johnson '96** were inducted into the CESJDS Athletic Hall of Fame.
- **Joe Vogel '15** is running for Maryland Congressional District 6.
- **Kira Epstein Begal '00** and William Begal welcomed a son, Louis Emmanuel.
- **Marnina Cowan '06** and Seth Coburn welcomed a son, Natan Barak.
- **Rebecca Maltzman '01** and Mike Maya welcomed a daughter, Libby Arielle.
- **Rachel Skulnik '14** and Jacob Scharf welcomed a son, Asher Lev.
- **Ari Eisen '11** and Sarah Smith were married.
- **Mira Mendick '09** and Ashley Luttmmer were married.
- **Tamar Eisen '13** and **Jake Mintz '13** were engaged.
- **Bela Galit Krifcher '11** and Justin Jacobs were engaged.
- **Arielle Oppenheimer '14** and Nick Balanda were engaged.
- **Madison Roll '13** and Charlie Barry were engaged.
- **Linor Shemesh '14** and Colin Burke were engaged.

## COMMUNITY

- **Rabbi Reuven S. Greenvald**, former CESJDS Principal, was appointed Director of Year-In-Israel Program at Hebrew Union College's Taube Family Campus in Jerusalem.
- **Dr. Eliana Lipsky**, former Middle School Principal and CESJDS parent, was published in the Spring 2023 *HaYidion: The Prizmah Journal* on relationships.
- **Ryan Spiegel**, CESJDS parent, was nominated to be the next Maryland State Delegate representing Gaithersburg and Rockville in the state legislature.

# Lower School Log:

## The Gift of Failure...in Math

◆ By **Jennifer Rittberg**, Lower School Math & Scheduling Coordinator



When I tell people that I am a math teacher, most adults apologetically confess that they hated math class as children. Upon further probing, it is revealed that they are confusing not liking math with not believing they are good at it. However, does being good at something automatically mean you like it? And what does it mean to be “good at math?”

From the perspective of a teacher, a student who can answer every question correctly is not necessarily “good at math,” rather, they are being given work that is too easy for them and, perhaps surprisingly, most students feel the same way. If you ask a child, very rarely will they report that they loved a math lesson because the skill taught was easy and they already knew how to do everything.

Students typically enjoy when they are given a problem that is challenging for them, that requires them to pause, reflect, collaborate with others, try, fail, and try again. In order for this experience to be fun and not scary or upsetting, it needs to take place in an environment that has been established as a safe place for making and working through mistakes.

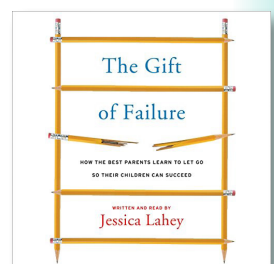
Here at CESJDS, the math team has long been embedding messages of growth mindset into our curriculum. For example, in Beth Gershman’s 5th grade math classroom, you will find signs sharing messages such as “mistakes are welcome here,” and our students are explicitly taught the brain research that “mistakes make your brain grow” (specifically that brain growth remains steady when a person completes a math problem successfully, but that synapses are created when a mistake is made). So, how do we actually put this philosophy into practice?

One place we see this is in Hannah Margolis’ 4th grade math classroom, where she starts the year by teaching her students how to play games, including the essential skills of how to win and how to lose. During her introductory lessons, she makes a point of playing each student in Connect 4, and she plays to win. Most students cannot beat her (although a few sometimes do), but they learn that it is OK to try their hardest and not win, and that it is possible to win and still be kind. They learn that they are expected to try their hardest AND to encourage and support each other, play fair, and accept the results of the game respectfully. This experience sets the stage for a classroom where they can expect to encounter obstacles, and cultivates the mindset that success is not always the same as winning.

Mathematics often requires trial and error, but it can be difficult for a student to try something out when they are not certain it will be correct. Math Enrichment Specialist Mollie Wuor is known for bringing challenges into every classroom from Gurim through 5th grade and one of her favorite tools is her set of number tiles. This small modification of providing movable tiles printed with each digit 0-9 allows students to tackle problems that could, at first, seem impossible because placing a tile is less of a commitment than writing down a number. As students place digits, then move them around, they are rapidly performing multiple calculations, adjusting their thinking, and problem-solving. They are practicing the skill of trial and error using a tool that allows a wrong answer to be part of a process, as opposed to a singular failed attempt.

In our summer read, *The Gift of Failure*, Jessica Lahey emphasizes the importance of allowing students to experience failure as a stepping stone to success. Nowhere is this concept more relevant than in the math classroom. Rather than fearing mistakes, we provide a nurturing environment for students to explore safely, make errors, and learn from them. By fostering a culture that embraces failure, we empower young learners to develop resilience, problem-solving skills, and a growth mindset that will serve them well throughout their academic journey and beyond.

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# Middle School Musings: Where Tradition Meets Innovation - A Vision for the CESJDS Middle School Math Program

◆ By **Ethan Merlin**, Middle School Math Department Chair, Curriculum Coordinator, and Teacher



In the twenty years since I began my math teaching career at CESJDS, the content of a middle school Algebra I course in schools across our region has shifted dramatically. Public schools, in particular, have revised their math curricula significantly, most recently to align with the national Common Core standards. Independent schools, to varying degrees, have had to discern when, and to what degree, to make parallel changes, both because we want to provide the best education and because colleges' expectations for our students are shaped by the changes underway in secondary math education writ large.

Now back at CESJDS after stints in two other schools, I'm thinking about how CESJDS' commitment to blend tradition and innovation can inform us as we chart a path for our own middle school math program. In some ways, the trends in middle school math education have been for the good. Rather than trusting that middle schoolers would come to appreciate the bigger picture in high school, the current generation of Algebra I courses for middle schoolers bring applied concepts, like the idea of a function, out of high school and into 7th and 8th grades. These curricula spend much more time demonstrating through applications how algebra is useful.

But I've come to believe that these changes have given short-shrift to a core goal of middle school math education, which is to produce students whose confidence and automaticity in algebraic manipulation equips them to be successful in high school math courses. I played piano as a young person, and the hours of practicing scales were necessary skill-building to develop the "muscles" that enabled me to play Chopin. In our eagerness to expose middle schoolers to the beautiful music of advanced math concepts, today's middle school math courses aren't always providing enough practice and training in the skills that would equip students to confidently engage with high school and college math.

Twenty years of writing and revising my own curricula for middle and high school math classes, in both public and private schools, have convinced me that skill-building can be engaging and empowering. Many of our students learn the skills to read Hebrew and recognize trope notes in order to chant Torah for their *b'nei mitzvah*. They practice for a year or more, and then they beam when sharing their new skills with their community. In the same way, many of the middle school students in my classroom have learned through daily practice how to speak the language of algebra, and then they shine as they build up to more and more complex skills by the end of the school year.

What does it mean to meet tradition with innovation right now? We will not best serve our students by rejecting contemporary reforms as too radical, and neither will we best serve the students by embracing current trends mindlessly. Math educators owe it to our students to meld the best of the old and the new into something even better. I've looked for an off-the-shelf curriculum that achieves the balance that I think would best serve my students. Unfortunately, in my view all of the major current published middle school math curricula, still in the course of a pendulum swing away from the old ways, do not yet combine the best of both worlds.

At CESJDS, then, our math program has an opportunity to lead. I enter the next school year so excited to collaborate with my colleagues in all three divisions in forging a path forward that is both innovative and grounded — both incorporating new insights about learning and also steeped in ways of teaching math that served our students' parents and grandparents well.

Ethan Merlin taught math at CESJDS from 2002-2010. He returned in 2022, and he is taking on the role of Middle School Math Department Chair for the 2023-2024 school year.

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# High School Highlights:

## Learning and Leading - Using Scientific Research to Advocate for Change

◆ By **Aileen Goldstein**, High School Assistant Principal



Experimenting and research is at the heart of the high school science program at CESJDS. We strive to ensure that our students are ethical, responsible, and compassionate global citizens with the skills and social understanding to lead. Our high school science program is guided by these principles, fostering the critical thinking and collaborative skills required for experimentation as we learn deeply about the world around us.

As scientists, students begin to self-direct their learning, choosing their own scientific paths as learners from a rich array of courses in the fields of biology, chemistry, physics, genetics & biotechnology, anatomy & physiology, and ecology & climate science. They engage actively in the scientific process of research and experimentation and learn how to use science to make positive change in the world around them.

Perhaps the best example of this research and student-led work is embodied in *The Bohr-Franklin Science Journal*, currently in its sixth year, which showcases the scientific writing and research of CESJDS students and cultivates an appreciation for scientific inquiry, learning, and growth in our community. This award-winning student journal rivals publications at the university level, offering student editors and peer reviewers the opportunity to delve into the scientific process while learning about scientific publications and research.

This year's publication included the work of 25 CESJDS scientists, focusing on a wide array of topics in the fields of biology, chemistry, physics, STEM, and psychology. Among the articles are many advocating for use of recent scientific breakthroughs to address challenges facing us today.

In their article, "The Magic of Carbon Capture," Jonah Beinart (Grade 12) and Alex Reichmann (Grade 12) tackle the question of climate change by exploring the potential positive impacts of carbon capture to remove CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the atmosphere. Following a rigorous study of carbon capture, Beinart and Reichmann conclude "with a host of benefits and no negative consequences, [carbon capture] is a productive method to hopefully curb the effects of climate change."

Likewise, Ari Goldberg (Grade 12) and Eliot Rogal (Grade 12) in their article, "A Better Plastic," tackles the challenge of the irreversible damages to the environment as a result of disposable plastics. According to Goldberg and Rogal, "Carbon-hydrogen bonds found in plastics are among the strongest known bonds in nature...By breaking down these bonds, we can find an efficient way to break down plastics." Goldberg and Rogal point to ionomers, "renewable plastics," created by breaking hydrogen bonds, as a "newfound discovery [which] could change the environmental effects of plastic forever."

Cati Werbin-Gradel (Grade 11) explores the potential for fibroblast cells to help heal bone degeneration in her article "Osteogenic Transdifferentiation." According to Werbin-Gradel, scientists can convert the fibroblast into a stem cell which, in turn, can be converted into an osteoblast-like cell which can be used to fill gaps, "resulting in a stronger bone tissue structure...Since the fibroblasts would be taken from one's own body, osteogenic transdifferentiation would work more smoothly because the cells are in the same environment and familiar with the...person's body." While this research is still in its infancy, Werbin-Gradel is encouraged by the potential, particularly as a means of combating bone tissue generation as a result of aging.

Through their leadership and research, the contributors to *The Bohr-Franklin Science Journal* are embracing their roles as ethical, responsible, and compassionate global citizens, using their skills and understanding to lead and make a difference. Soon, they and their peers will join many fellow CESJDS alumni in applying these skills even more broadly to change the world. We are eager to benefit from their contributions!

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## Explore and Ride the Wave of Appreciation on Our Wall of Gratitude

We are profoundly grateful for your unwavering support and generosity throughout our 2023 *Ma'ayan* Annual Campaign. Your contributions have created a ripple effect, impacting exceptional education, meaningful Jewish experiences, and a wide range of enrichments that make CESJDS an extraordinary place.

The heartfelt messages on our Wall of Gratitude beautifully reflect the enduring friendships, strong bonds, and transformative educational experiences shared by parents, students, faculty, alumni, grandparents, and our entire community.

Thank you again for your unwavering commitment and for being an integral part of our *Ma'ayan*. Visit our Wall of Gratitude at [cesjds.org/about/digital-media/wall-of-gratitude](https://cesjds.org/about/digital-media/wall-of-gratitude).



“CESJDS creates a caring environment and appropriately challenges our children while providing every resource to help them succeed. It is more than a school; it is a community that reflects and instills the values of the Jewish tradition with authenticity and joy.”

-Shulamit & Jordan Hersh, CESJDS Parents

“My friendships, career trajectory, and personal growth can all be traced back to my time at CESJDS. It is of paramount importance to me that CESJDS continues to thrive so my children have the opportunities that I was provided.”

-Zach Roth '10, CESJDS Alum



“Our grandsons have learned so much and blossomed in their first year at CESJDS.”

-Leslie and Barrie Sandler, CESJDS Grandparents and Alumni Parents



“I love my school and I am very proud to be a JDS'er. Thank you to my teachers for everything they do.”

-Benjamin M. (Grade 4)



“CESJDS has made a ripple in my life because CESJDS brought a richness and joy to my work life that I never dreamed of. I cherish every minute I spent learning with CESJDS students and was privileged to be part of the staff for 21 years.”

-Sue Marx, Former CESJDS Faculty



“It’s still hard to wrap our heads around the fact that, for the first time in 19 years, we do not have a child enrolled at CESJDS as our youngest graduated in 2023. During our many years at CESJDS, we watched our boys – Jacob ’16, Zachary ’20, and Jonah ’23 – mature as thinkers and writers, thrive emotionally and spiritually, and most importantly become mensches who are well equipped to step into and become productive, thoughtful, and positive members of our community. We could not have asked for a more invested and committed faculty and staff, who strived to know each of our kids as individuals and supported them academically and emotionally. And not only have our children benefitted – we could not ask for more wonderful friends than the ones we’ve made through our CESJDS connection.”

-Rebecca Musher Gross and Jonathan Gross, CESJDS Alumni Parents



“My children received a great education, made amazing lifelong friends, and developed a strong connection to Judaism that has remained strong since they graduated.”

-Alan Kravitz and Vivian Riefberg, CESJDS Alumni Parents

## Why I Give: Miriam Minsk ‘17

I am writing to you from the cold and foggy San Francisco, where I am currently a rising second year student in an eight-year dual MD/PhD program at the University of California, San Francisco. Although moving across the country to pursue my graduate training far away from my family and CESJDS friends was not an easy decision for me, it has been an exciting first year out on the west coast and it is starting to feel like home here. I am taking medical school coursework, learning patient history taking and the physical examination, and beginning to explore different clinical specialties. I am also rotating in some research labs to find one that I would like to join for my PhD work. This graduate training is one of many steps on my journey to one day be a physician-scientist who both sees patients and runs a research lab studying genetics, molecular biology, and human disease.



My CESJDS education and science teachers, especially Daniela Munteanu, were fundamental in developing my interest in science and research. Ms. Munteanu was my teacher for four years throughout middle and high school, and her love for chemistry and teaching inspired me to pursue a career in academic medicine and science. She fostered my love for running scientific experiments during our chemistry labs. Most importantly, though, Ms. Munteanu really encouraged us to all work hard and follow our passions so that we can excel, and was very supportive of me conducting research, doing research internships over the summer, and pursuing my science passions outside of the classroom. She fostered a positive and supportive learning environment for me and for my classmates. I had an interest in medicine from a young age because my mother is a physician, but it was throughout high school in Ms. Munteanu’s classroom, where I decided science and bench research was something I wanted to pursue further in college as well.

I very fondly look back on my days sitting in Ms. Munteanu’s classroom, and always look forward to being able to visit her at CESJDS when I am back at home in Maryland. One of the many reasons I give back to CESJDS and participate in the *Ma’ayan* Annual Campaign is because it is important to me that students can continue to have supportive teachers who inspire them to find and follow their own academic passions.

**בית מדרש צוריאל**

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**UPCOMING EVENTS**

- **OCTOBER 23:** NO CLASSES Professional Development Day
- **OCTOBER 29:** Ignite the Night Parent Event
- **NOVEMBER 8:** Lower School Family Literacy Night
- **NOVEMBER 10:** Veterans Day/Visiting Day
- **NOVEMBER 20-21:** Virtual Student Learning Conferences
- **NOVEMBER 22-24:** SCHOOL CLOSED Thanksgiving



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