



From Rabbi Malkus, Head of School

At CESJDS, Torah learning is not simply another subject in the schedule, it is at the heart of our mission and the foundation of our students' intellectual and spiritual growth. In this edition of *The Lions' Roar*, we are proud to highlight the vibrant culture of Teaching and Learning Torah that shapes our classrooms from Gurim through 12th grade.

Our commitment to *Torah L'shmah*/learning Torah for its own sake and *Ahavat Torah*/love of Torah, animates the daily life of our school. These core values inspire students to study Jewish texts by engaging with them with curiosity, passion, and a sense of personal ownership. At CESJDS, Torah learning invites students into a centuries old living conversation that has unfolded across generations and continues to guide how we think, learn, and live today.

One of the defining strengths of a CESJDS education is our integrated curriculum. Students learn more deeply because the skills they develop in studying Torah strengthen their overall academic thinking. When students analyze classical Jewish texts, they are also developing the habits of mind that lead to strong learning across every discipline. Torah study teaches students to read closely, evaluate multiple interpretations, weigh evidence, and articulate thoughtful perspectives. It teaches students to value, appreciate, and understand multiple opinions.

In our classrooms, Torah learning comes to life by fostering a culture of questioning, a culture of interpretation, and a culture of perspective-taking, all grounded in enduring Jewish values. Students are encouraged to ask meaningful questions, wrestle with complex ideas, and explore the many voices within the Jewish textual tradition. They discover that a single verse can generate generations of commentary, debate, and insight. This process not only deepens their understanding of Torah, but strengthens their ability to think critically, communicate clearly, and engage respectfully with diverse viewpoints.

The way we teach and students learn Torah emerges from the [Portrait of a CESJDS Graduate](#), which calls on students to read, interpret, and make personal meaning from a wide range of Jewish texts. From their earliest years through graduation, students build the knowledge and confidence to approach Torah, Talmud, and other classical sources with both skill and curiosity.

Across every grade level, our Torah program is guided by three central goals:

1. Ownership of the Texts – Students develop a sense that Jewish texts belong to them and are part of their own intellectual and spiritual inheritance.
2. Skills of Interpretation – Students gain the language, analytical tools, and textual literacy necessary to read and interpret classical Jewish sources with depth and independence.
3. Personal Meaning and Purpose – Students learn to draw wisdom and values from these texts, allowing them to inform their character, choices, and sense of purpose in life.

This approach reflects the broader mission of CESJDS: to foster the growth of confident and compassionate thinkers who engage the world through Jewish values.

What makes the CESJDS educational journey especially powerful is how our students learn to connect ancient wisdom to contemporary life. Torah study becomes a framework for exploring ethical questions, examining real-world dilemmas, and discovering the enduring relevance of Jewish ideas.

In the pages that follow, you will see how our extraordinary faculty bring Torah learning to life each day, helping students develop a lifelong love of learning, a deep connection to Jewish tradition, and the intellectual tools to engage the world with wisdom and purpose.

This is Torah teaching and learning in action. And it is one of the many ways CESJDS helps our students grow not only as learners, but as thoughtful Jews and engaged citizens.



SCHOOL

- CESJDS received a **\$5 million gift** from the Robert H. Smith and Clarice R. Smith Family Foundation, carried out by their son, David Bruce Smith to establish two endowed funds for Tuition Assistance and Faculty Excellence.
- CESJDS hosted the **Thelma Yellin Performing Arts School Big Band** from Givatayim and students performed together at a community concert.
- CESJDS hosted the inaugural **Capital Jewish Hoops Invitational**, bringing together top Jewish high school basketball teams from across the region for an unforgettable weekend of competition, community, and pride.
- CESJDS **Margolius Family Debate team** finished 4th in the county.
- **Varsity Boys Basketball** and **Varsity Girls Basketball** both placed second at the Capital Jewish Hoops Invitational.
- **High School Boys Cross Country** won the 2025 Maryland Private School Cross Country 1A State Championship - their 4th state title in the past five years.
- **High School Robotics Team** earned their highest finish ever at Prowl at the Potomac, competing in a field of over 60 teams.
- **Middle School Robotics Team** won the Judges Award at the VEX IQ Robotics competition.
- **Lower School Robotics Team** finished in the top 10 in the Skills Challenge at the VEX IQ Robotics competition.
- **Varsity Boys Basketball** tied for first place in the PVAC and competed in the PVAC Finals.
- **Varsity Girls Basketball** made it to the PVAC Finals for the fourth year in a row.
- **JV Boys Basketball** won the PVAC Championship for the second year in a row.

STUDENT

- **5 students** won medals in the Mid-Atlantic Wrestling Tournament: **Jonah Soffler** (Grade 11): Gold; **Danny Singerman** (Grade 11): Silver; **Adin Kahan** (Grade 11): Bronze; **Theo Rothenberg** (Grade 12): Bronze; **Jacob Sheib** (Grade 11): Bronze
- **8 students** won a Best of School Newspaper award for their articles: **Eliana Abrams** (Grade 11), **Maiya Blumenthal** (Grade 12), **Jordana Dauber** (Grade 11), **Vivi Ducker** (Grade 12), **David Federiwicz** (Grade 10), **Jackson Gill** (Grade 10), **Sophie Schwartz** (Grade 12), **Eliana Wolf** (Grade 12)
- **Ephraim Blair** (Grade 10) placed third in the National High School Student Essay Contest from The Buckley Institute.
- **Ephraim Blair** (Grade 10) and **David Loeffler** (Grade 10) were accepted as candidates for Blood Cancer United's, 2026 Washington, D.C. Student

Visionaries of the Year campaign.

- **Cyrus Blumenthal** (Grade 12) made the all tournament team for boys at the Capital Jewish Hoops Invitational and made the PVAC All Conference First Team.
- **Miles Boyer** (Grade 8) won second place in the 400 and 500 free style for Varsity Swimming.
- **Sarah Charapp** (Grade 10) won the Excellence in Leadership and Community Service award at the inaugural American Exceptionalism Awards Gala.
- **Jordana Dauber** (Grade 11) made the PVAC All Conference First Team for basketball.
- **Jesse Fisher** (Grade 12) made the PVAC All Conference Third Team for basketball.
- **Ruby Kotok** (Grade 12) and **Nathan Szubin** (Grade 12) were selected as candidates for the 2026 U.S. Presidential Scholars Program.
- **Lila Levine** (Grade 8) won second place in the 200 free style for Varsity Swimming.
- **Tali Loeffler** (Grade 12) made the all tournament team for girls at the Capital Jewish Hoops Invitational and made the PVAC All Conference First Team.
- **Ella Longman** (Grade 12) received a PVAC All Conference Honorable Mention for basketball.
- **Theo Rothenberg** (Grade 12) Received the Aryeh Zinkin Yeshiva Wrestling Scholarship.
- **Lilah Sacks** (Grade 11) and **Noah Sacks** (Grade 11) made it to the final four in the County Debate Finals tournament.
- **Caroline Salz** (Grade 11) won the sportsmanship award for the girls at the Capital Jewish Hoops Invitational.
- **Benjamin Selzer** (Grade 8) won the Middle School Spelling Bee and will compete in regionals.
- **Dylan Shank** (Grade 11) made the PVAC All Conference Second Team for basketball.
- **Eve Sharp** (Grade 11) organized a female self defense training session led by Bartman MMA & Self Defense.
- **Yarden Wilkenfeld** (Grade 11) made the PVAC All Conference Second Team for basketball.

FACULTY & STAFF

- **Juan Alcivar**, Girls Volleyball Coach, won the Exceptionalism in Sports and Mentoring Award for empowering veterans and young athletes alike while shaping the next generation of leaders at the inaugural American Exceptionalism Awards Gala.
- **Lenore Layman**, Director of Lower School Educational Support Services, was published in a Prizmah Publication for her article about JDAIM titled "JDAIM: An Opportunity to Further Educate our Community and Advance Inclusion"
- **Becca Lipscomb**, Lower School Learning Specialist,

recently completed her program and received a Dyslexia Certificate in Assessment and Intervention from the University of Florida.

- **Rabbi Mitchel Malkus**, Head of School, received an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity from JTS in recognition of 25 years in the rabbinate.
- **Marc Silberstein**, Middle School Jewish Text Teacher and Zman Kodesh Coordinator, and his wife Lisa welcomed a daughter, Lyla Paige.
- **Sam Sullivan**, Middle School English and Humanities Teacher, and his wife Michelle, welcomed a son, Matteo Mitchell.
- **Benjamin Tellie**, Upper School Art Teacher, defended his dissertation at George Washington University in the Ed.D. Curriculum and Instruction program.
- **Debra White-Dilworth**, Photography Teacher, has been chosen to participate in the ICJS Fellowship program for 2025.

ALUMNI

- **Lev BenAvram '22** was named one of just four male finalists nationwide for the Manischewitz L'Cheisman Trophy, honoring Jewish college athletes for excellence in sport, leadership, and community impact.
- **Abbey Frank '89**, received the 2026 David Topol '84 (z"l) Alumni Leadership Award.
- **Dr. Rachel Rubin '03** was featured on CBS Mornings with Norah O'Donnell to talk about women's health.
- **Sammy Felsen '14** and Yael Rachel welcomed a son, Tsuf Shalom.
- **Morgan Franklin '09** and **Sam Weinberger '09** welcomed a daughter, Lucy Patricia.
- **Maya Arber '17** and Bosco Nshimiyumukiza were married.
- **Sam Greenberg '09** and Hillel Friedman were married.
- **Jacob Gross '16** and Abby Wolfe were married.
- **Aliza Layman '13** and Ari Friedman were married.
- **Gabriella Pilarski '16** and Isabella Czernia were married.
- **Hannah Wandersman '18** and Sammy Turk Tolub were married.
- **Izzy Zissman '15** and McKenna Zissman were married.
- **Henry Baron '12** and Sari Babkes were engaged.
- **Abigail Elson '19** and Uri Garfunkel were engaged.
- **Alysse Weinberg '16** & **Kobi Fodor '14** were engaged.

COMMUNITY

- CESJDS Parent **Rachael Spiegel** won best photographer 2025 from the Washington Jewish Week.

Lower School Log:

Lifelong Lessons from Torah Learning

◆ By **MollyBeth Rushfield**, Judaic Studies Teacher, **Daniella Friedman**, Judaic Studies and Hebrew Language Coordinator, and **Rebecca Prigal**, Acting Lower School Principal



In the Lower School, Torah learning invites students into the narrative and history of our people through text study and rich, related activities. By engaging with the *parashah*/ the weekly Torah portion and with broader Torah texts in the older elementary grades, students develop both a love for the language of Torah and the critical thinking skills that make this learning so meaningful and lasting. Our engaging approach lays the groundwork for a lifelong relationship with Torah study, grounded in curiosity, reverence, and intellectual rigor.

Classrooms bring biblical stories to life through a variety of modalities. Storytelling and reenactment recreate the drama and moral complexity of the text. Games and debates turn ancient dilemmas into lively, accessible learning moments. Art, music, and movement help students internalize themes in memorable ways. These activities make Torah study compelling; children not only encounter timeless lessons, they also practice empathy, consider multiple perspectives, and wrestle with challenging situations, skills that transfer beyond the classroom.

Our curriculum is guided by the Standards and Benchmarks program at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), developed in part by Rabbi Matthew Bellas z”l, Daniella Friedman, and MollyBeth Rushfield. These shared standards provide a unifying baseline so that, regardless of instructional style or language, every Lower School student builds a strong foundation in Torah learning. While every Lower School class shares the same overarching goals, essential questions, and alignment with the JTS Standards and Benchmarks, teachers adapt methods to meet the needs of diverse learners. Differentiation is central to our approach. Some classrooms emphasize movement, hands-on projects, and visual arts to engage young learners. Other classes teach primarily in English to build comprehension and discussion skills. Additional classes place a stronger emphasis on Hebrew decoding and reading biblical Hebrew. This intentional variety ensures that each child is met where they are and is given opportunities to grow both linguistically and intellectually. This diversity of approach is a major strength. Teachers bring individual passions and expertise, including storytelling, music, drama, visual art, and language instruction, into their lessons, offering students multiple entry points into the text. The result is joyful, developmentally appropriate learning of the text itself and more complex thinking in consideration of classic and more modern commentary. Children learn to love Torah, ask deeper questions, and see the Torah not merely as an ancient record but as a living source that shapes our people’s past, present, and future. This rooted, joyful entry point prepares students for more advanced study and fosters the habits of inquiry and connection that will sustain them throughout their Jewish lives.



Middle School Musings:

Teaching and Learning Torah: The 6th Grade *Sukkah* Project

◆ By **Rabba Aliza Libman Baronofsky**, Middle School Math and Jewish Text Teacher and B'Yachad Coordinator



Deeply ingrained in our Jewish belief system is the idea that our actions show who we truly are. The CESJDS core values are carried out on a daily basis through our individual choices.

In the 6th grade, students are experiencing additional independence. They are capable of (and expected to) navigate the spaces of the middle school responsibly. Our main units in the 6th grade Toshba curriculum center around how we create and share spaces, using the *Mishna* tractates *Sukkah*, *Bava Kamma*, and *Bava Metzia*.

Our unit about the *sukkah* asks students to consider how design choices reflect our values. Using skits and worksheets, we think about how decisions we make can impact our community, emphasize hospitality, and express our vulnerability. The rules in the *Mishna* tell us how tall a *sukkah* should be, where it can be placed, and how sunny it should be. Each of these rules creates an opportunity to think about our big ideas.

The final piece of this unit is the annual *sukkah* project, a favorite of our students. Students select a new *mishna* we did not cover in class. (The *sukkah* in a tree and the *sukkah* on a boat are perennial favorites.) They read the *mishna* in Hebrew and in translation and then create a *sukkah* model that incorporates both the new rules as well as our original rules. They make and explain design choices to reflect their values. Students often talk about how they will design the *sukkah* to accommodate guests, or use recycled materials to show responsible stewardship of the earth.

Through all of this, we keep coming back to intentionality. In class, we learn the *mishna* that tells us that a *sukkah* can be as old as the builder wants, as long as it was created for the purpose of *Sukkot*. Similarly, a reed mat can be used as *schach* if it was made for that purpose but not if it was made for sleeping on. For our students on the cusp of *bar* and *bat mitzvah*, it's powerful to consider how the exact same action is transformed by having a particular intention. The students construct the *sukkah* in groups but individually record videos of themselves explaining their work. These videos allow us to see how each child has internalized the big ideas and small details of the unit.

The *sukkot* themselves are often masterpieces - last year, we displayed many of them at Blecher Family Arts Chai-Lights. At the end of the year, when I ask the students what their favorite part of the year was, they overwhelmingly point to the *sukkah* project as both meaningful and also enjoyable. As we collect materials each fall, I get excited thinking about what new insights this year's group of 6th graders will showcase when they bring their individual perspectives to our ancient texts.



High School Highlights:

Thinking Through Texts

◆ By **Grace McMillan**, Nancy and Paul M. Hamburger Jewish Text High School Department Chair



“Wait, so Rambam is saying we lost the ability to know the Truth that is God?”

“The Abarbanel says it’s an allegory about not getting so absorbed in secular studies that we lose touch with Torah. If he’s talking about it as an allegory, is he taking a literary perspective?”

“I thought that from a literary perspective, God is a character with emotions, just like other characters.”

“Doesn’t the historical perspective say this is from an early source, from J?”

These bits of conversation from a 10th grade Biblical Themes in Modern Texts class about the *Gan Eden*/Garden of Eden story reflect the cognitive flexibility and pluralistic approach CESJDS students develop when they study sacred texts at the core of our Jewish tradition.

Already in 9th grade, students are presented with challenging texts to dissect in multiple courses. In *Ethical Dilemmas*, students learn a *suggiya*/section from Baba Metzia 62a (from the Babylonian Talmud) about how to make choices and allocate limited resources when people’s lives are at risk. This classic discussion of a triage situation posits two people in a desert with one jug of water: if both drink, both will die; if one drinks, the other will die and one will reach a town. In 46 words, this rabbinic debate presents two different opinions, each with ethical logic, a nuanced interpretation of a *pasuk*/verse from the *Tanakh*, and a glimpse into the historical development of legal thinking. After spending time figuring out who is arguing what and why, students then consider how that text might inform choices in an emergency room or on a battlefield.

Meanwhile, down the hall in 9th grade *Talmud*, students are debating how to understand the meaning of “intentional” when it comes to one person killing another. And in 11th grade *Rendering Legal Decisions*, students are comparing rabbinic *teshuvot*/legal opinions from Reform, medieval, and Modern Orthodox rabbis on the use of stem cells in medical research. In a 12th grade *Identities in Transformation* class, students are learning about the first blind girl to read from the Torah for her *bat mitzvah* and the *teshuvah* her mother wrote to identify the *halakhic*/Jewish legal basis for that revolutionary act. And and and..

◆◆ Everyone must wrestle through difficulties and nuances, evaluate and reflect, question and challenge assumptions. ◆◆

In all of these classes, no one “right” answer is taught. No question that AI could answer for their developing personal ethical sensibilities is posed. No opportunity for cognitive atrophy is offered. Everyone must wrestle through difficulties and nuances, evaluate and reflect, question and challenge assumptions. In a world with rapidly changing technology that is profoundly impacting the landscapes of education and employment, the ancient tradition of learning Torah offers pathways to developing the eternally relevant skills of critical thinking. With computers closed, books open, students discuss their close reading, clarify their interpretations, and ask and answer questions from multiple perspectives.

As they move through their time in the CESJDS High School, each student in Jewish Text classes works to build their own thoughtfully informed ownership of our Jewish tradition to ground them as they move into the future.

Rochelle Sobel Endowment for Jewish Studies

◆ Ken Nechin & Annette Bicher, Julianna '14, Hannah '16, Zoe '20, and Hadley '23

We are truly honored to celebrate Rochelle Sobel as a CESJDS Legend. When we first began exploring schools for our children, we toured the Lower School and happened to observe Rochelle in her element — teaching Hebrew and Judaics to young students. In that single moment, we recognized the profound impact of an educator who can inspire young minds. She brought warmth, energy, and creativity to her classroom, keeping her students fully engaged while thoughtfully guiding them through the lesson. It was clear that her teaching extended well beyond academics; she was nurturing curiosity, confidence, and a genuine love of learning — exactly what we wanted for our children.

After attending the 2025 LEGENDS event, our family reflected on how we might meaningfully honor a faculty member whose work truly shapes the school community. We unanimously agreed that Gveret Sobel exemplifies the spirit of this recognition. The Lower School lays the essential foundation for every student's future achievements in the Upper School and beyond. That foundation is strengthened each day by Rochelle's dedication, passion, and unwavering commitment to her students. Without educators like Rochelle Sobel — and the exceptional Lower School faculty alongside her — the success of the broader school community would simply not be possible.



Sue Zuckerman Fund for Student Journalism & Educational Support Services

◆ Charles A. "Chuck" Fox, MD '91



Sue Zuckerman (aka "Z") didn't just run a school newspaper. She ran a newsroom where teenagers believed, because she emboldened them, that what they were doing mattered. She made us feel 100 feet tall. She defended us, advocated for us, and trusted us like human beings. When I was features editor and a conflict arose, Z had my back. It was the first time an adult truly believed in my good intentions and my process. Her impact at JDS has been felt since 1981 and will last another hundred years. She is, without question, a legend.

That's why a group of Lion's Tale Alumni Editors - The Editorial Board - are proud to establish the Sue Zuckerman Fund for Student Journalism and Educational Support Services. There's nothing more important than playing an influential role in the life of a child, and Z has that times several thousand. This fund strengthens *The Lion's Tale* and supports students who need someone to see their potential and help them reach it.

Visit cesjds.org/donate to make a donation to honor Rochelle and Sue's legendary impact on CESJDS. For more information email Sarah Shapiro, Development Director at sshapiro@cesjds.org.



LEGENDS

FROM THE LION'S DEN

CELEBRATING CESJDS ALUMNI

LEGENDS from the Lion's Den on March 22, 2026 brought the CESJDS community together for an unforgettable afternoon celebrating leadership, connection, and school spirit as part of our 60th anniversary year. Alumni, families, faculty current and past, and students joined in community, shared stories, and honored beloved faculty members Rochelle Sobel and Sue Zuckerman for their 40+ years of continued impact, along with alum Abbey Frank '89.

Take a look at highlights from this inspiring celebration of our past, present, and future!



An Evening of Learning **ערב לימוד** Honoring Rabbi Mitchel Malkus



Wednesday
May 27, 2026
7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

For thirteen years, Rabbi Mitchel Malkus has shaped, articulated, and lived the values that define CESJDS. In his honor, we invite you to gather as a community for an *Erev Limmud*, an evening of shared learning that reflects the spirit of leadership he has championed every day. Followed by a dessert reception.



May 3 - 8, 2026

One Week.
Infinite Impact.



cesjds.org/givingweek



בית מדרש צוריאל

Administrative Offices & Lower School Campus 1901 East Jefferson Street Rockville, Maryland 20852	Annette M. & Theodore N. Lerner Upper School Campus 11710 Hunters Lane Rockville, Maryland 20852
--	---

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **MAY 3-8**.....CESJDS Giving Week
- **MAY 4-8**.....Faculty & Staff Appreciation Week
- **MAY 5**.....*Lag B'Omer*
- **MAY 8**.....*Dor L'Dor*
- **MAY 20**.....Blecher Family Arts Chai-Lights
- **MAY 22**.....SCHOOL CLOSED - *Shavu-ot*
- **MAY 25**.....SCHOOL CLOSED - Memorial Day
- **JUNE 2**.....Upper School Spring Concert
- **JUNE 12**.....EARLY DISMISSAL - Last Day of School



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from Rabbi Mitchel Malkus.....	1
<i>Kol HaKavod</i> (Accomplishments).....	2
Lower School Log: Lifelong Lessons from Torah Learning.....	3
Middle School Musings: Teaching and Learning Torah: The 6th Grade <i>Sukkah</i> Project.....	4
High School Highlights: Thinking Through Texts.....	5
Rochelle Sobel Endowment for Jewish Studies.....	6
Sue Zuckerman Fund for Student Journalism & Educational Support Services.....	6
LEGENDS from the Lion's Den Highlights.....	7
<i>Erev Limmud</i> : Honoring Rabbi Mitchel Malkus.....	7
CESJDS Giving Week.....	7
Upcoming Events.....	8