



From Dr. Jonathan Levy, Head of School

As I begin my journey as the new Head of School at Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, I want to share how grateful and excited I am to join this remarkable community. Over the years, I have admired CESJDS for its commitment to academic excellence, Jewish values, meaningful relationships, and the development of young people who are prepared to lead lives of purpose. To now have the opportunity to serve this community is both a privilege and a responsibility that I embrace with great enthusiasm.

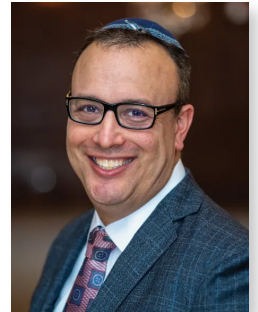
In my first days on campus, I have met many of the incredible people who make up the fabric of the school. It is clear that CESJDS is a place where learning is taken seriously, relationships matter, and every individual is encouraged to grow.

As I settle into my role, one of my primary goals is to listen and learn. I look forward to spending time with students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni, and community members to better understand the traditions, aspirations, and unique strengths that make CESJDS so special. While every school has its own story, the best way to appreciate that story is to hear it directly from the people who live it each day. In the weeks and months ahead, I hope to learn as much as I can about our community, its history, and its vision for the future.

It seems especially fitting that this message appears in this Summer edition of *The Lions' Roar*, highlighting the remarkable science learning taking place throughout our school, because the spirit of scientific inquiry provides a wonderful model for how I hope to approach my first year. At its core, science is driven by curiosity. Scientists ask questions, gather evidence, test assumptions, remain open to new discoveries, and continually refine their understanding. The most meaningful learning often begins not with having all the answers, but with asking thoughtful questions.

As I begin my work at CESJDS, I aspire to bring that same spirit of curiosity and inquiry to my role. I am eager to explore, observe, listen, and learn alongside all of you. Together, we can build on the strong foundation that already exists while continuing to discover new possibilities for growth and innovation.

Thank you for welcoming me into this extraordinary community. I look forward to an exciting year of learning, discovery, and partnership ahead.



כל הכבוד (Accomplishments)

SCHOOL

- **Dimensions yearbook** was prominently featured in Jostens Look Book.
- **The Lion's Tale** received the Gold Crown at the Columbia Scholastic Press Association.
- Several articles from **The Lion's Tale** won a Best of School Newspaper Online award.
- The **CESJDS Rocketry Team** made the American Rocketry Challenge National Finals, and placed in the top 50 of over 1,100 teams.
- The **High School Girls Varsity Track Team** finished in second place - the highest team finish since 2001.
- The **CESJDS Rocketry Team** competed in the Middle/High School Division of the NASA Student Launch Initiative and won two awards: the Payload Award and Judges Award.
- The **CESJDS Rocketry Club** presented at Rockets on the Hill, an annual STEM and aerospace advocacy event in Washington, DC.
- **Varsity Baseball** won the PVAC Championship.
- **Varsity Softball** won the PVAC Championship for the fourth year in a row.

STUDENT

- **3 students** in the CESJDS Coding Club qualified for the finals of the American Computer Science League competition: **Shai Weiss** (Grade 11), **Ben Cashion** (Grade 11), and **Ezra Libbin** (Grade 11).
- **7 students** were selected to have their work displayed in Representative Raskins 2026 Congressional Art Exhibition: **Anna Polon** (Grade 12), **Gabriel Waldman** (Grade 11), **Lior Zucker** (Grade 11), **Hannah Jakobovics** (Grade 11), **Eden Helfand** (Grade 10), **Zev Michaels** (Grade 10), and **Keren BenEzra** (Grade 10).
- **7 students** made the PVAC All Conference First Team for Track and Field: **Eve Sharp** (Grade 12), **Isaiah Segal-Geetter** (Grade 12), **Jake Forseter** (Grade 10), **Selina Bricker** (Grade 10), **Rayut Weiser-Rosenbaum** (Grade 10), **Mali Osofsky** (Grade 12), and **Lena Lourenco** (Grade 11).
- **Leia Barnett** (Grade 11) made the PVAC All Conference Second Team for Track and Field.
- **Caleb Berman** (Grade 12) made the PVAC All Conference Second Team for Boys Volleyball.
- **Micah Brickman** (Grade 12) won the first CESJDS Manager of the Year Award.
- **Jordana Dauber** (Grade 12) was named PVAC Varsity Softball Tournament MVP and Player of the Year.
- **Elana Ernst** (Grade 12) was selected for the Bronfman Fellowship.
- **Ayla Hurwitz** (Grade 10) was a finalist in the Gaithersburg Book Festival's High School Poetry Contest.

- **Lev Kotler** (Grade 9) made the PVAC All Conference First Team for Golf.
- **Noah Sacks** (Grade 12) was named PVAC Varsity Baseball Tournament MVP.
- **Mason Salomon** (Grade 10), **Logan Druzman** (Grade 11), and **Aviv Stein** (Grade 12) made the PVAC All Conference Second Team for Varsity Baseball.
- **Mae Stein** (Grade 10) and **Grant Levy** (Grade 12) made the PVAC All Conference First Team for Varsity Baseball.
- **Gabe Waldman** (Grade 11) was announced as a Brandon Victor Dixon Outstanding Achievement in Technical Theatre Finalist.
- **Rayut Weiser-Rosenbaum** (Grade 10) was named MVP at the PVAC Track and Field Championship.
- **Yarden Wilkenfeld** (Grade 12) and **Anna Polon** (Grade 12) made the PVAC All Conference First Team for Varsity Softball.
- **Nathan Yoskowitz** (Grade 11), **Ariel Alexander** (Grade 10), and **Michael Rubinstein** (Grade 12) made the PVAC All Conference Second Team for Boys Tennis.

FACULTY & STAFF

- **Rachel Bergstein**, Director of the CESJDS Center for Excellence and Engagement in Jewish History & Evonne and Elliot Schnitzer Family Jewish History Department Chair, was featured in the *Washington Jewish Week* for instilling a love of Judaism at CESJDS.
- **Ariela Greengart**, Lower School Administrative Assistant, and her husband Michael Felsenthal, welcome a son.
- Instructional Technology Specialists **Hadas Heyman** and **Beth Poston** presented to a full house at the Common Ground Conference with a presentation called AI Tasting, providing other educators a hands-on workshop on AI tools and uses for the classroom.
- **Rivka Magier '16**, Lower School Gurim Teacher, and **Yakov Bellas '16** were married.
- **Rabbi Mitch Malkus**, Former Head of School, spoke at the Network for Research in Jewish Education annual conference at the opening plenary on "The Value of the Knowledge We Create."
- **Grace McMillan**, Nancy and Paul Hamburger Jewish Text Chair, participated in Prizmah's Podcast series *Research Encounter* in the episode "What Is Rabbinics, Really?"
- **Shelli Putterman-Kenett**, Upper School Hebrew Department Chair and Upper School World Language Chair, co wrote a paper with Professor Leshem titled "Hebrew 2.0: A Language That Shapes Reality", which was recently published in the *Jewish Education Leadership* journal through the Lookstein Center at Bar-Ilan University.
- **Dorie Ravick '01**, Director of Engagement and

Lower School Admission, was published in *HaYidion: The Prizmah Journal* for her article on alumni ambassadorship.

- **MollyBeth Rushfield**, Lower School Judaics Teacher, received the Mensch award from the International Mensch Foundation.
- **Robbie Shorr '13**, High School Math Teacher and Jewish Life Chair and his wife Lydia Sonenklar welcomed a daughter.
- **Benjamin Tellie**, Upper School Art Teacher, successfully defended his dissertation and graduated with his doctoral degree from George Washington University in the Ed.D. Curriculum and Instruction program
- **Debra White-Dilworth**, Photography Teacher, won an award at the Nora School Photography Festival.

ALUMNI

- **Danny '82 and Wendi Abramowitz** received the Joseph Ottenstein Award at JSSA's "The Stars Come Out" celebration.
- **Rochelle Berman '22**, who, alongside co-choreographer Jonathan Cher, earned 2nd place for Original Folk Dance Choreography at the 2025 Karmiel Dance Festival.
- **Rabbi Micah Cowan '15** received rabbinic ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary.
- **Hadriel Dayanim's '26** composition "Submittance" was selected to move on to the Young Composers Project Masterclass and Showcase.
- **Bee Kotler '26** was named a finalist for the Brandon Victor Dixon Awards for his performance as Chip Tolentino in the CESJDS Joan and Marvin Rosenberg High School Musical, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*.
- **Rachel Eisenberg '05** and **Daniel Brujis '05** welcomed a son.
- **Maya Lieber '12** and James McNamara were married.
- **Ben Weinberger '15** and Taylor Martucci were married.
- **Keera Ginsburg '14** and Jake Horowitz were engaged.
- **Matthew Halper '14** and Carly Deixler were engaged.
- **Harry Wandersman '15** and Shira Forester were engaged.

Kol HaKavod!

Lower School Log:

Science in Early Childhood

◆ By **Dr. Alexis Soffler**, Lower School Science and STEM Coordinator



Plato wrote, “Let early education be a kind of amusement. You will then be able to find out the natural bent.” Today, we understand more than ever that children learn best when they are engaged in exploration, discovery, and play. Learning is never just about content; as children learn about the world, they are also learning about themselves as thinkers, problem-solvers, and members of a community. When this learning takes place in a classroom filled with warmth, predictability, enthusiasm, and joy, children thrive. This is the foundation of early childhood science at CESJDS.

Science is the exploration of the natural world through observation, questioning, and drawing conclusions. Teaching science to young children means helping them become scientists themselves. In our classroom, students are encouraged to wonder, investigate, and make discoveries through hands-on experiences.

Most lessons include multiple learning stations that allow children to choose how they engage with the topic in hands-on ways. For example, we recently had a lesson on honeybees. After reading a nonfiction book, students examined real honeycombs with hand lenses, observed insects preserved in lucite, used pattern blocks to investigate the efficiency of hexagons, practiced using pipettes to simulate bees returning nectar to the hive, and created “bee dances” to communicate information. By giving students meaningful

◆◆ By giving students meaningful learning choices, we tap into their natural curiosity. ◆◆



learning choices, we tap into their natural curiosity. The result is deeper engagement, thoughtful questions, and a genuine desire to learn more.

At the same time, students are learning far more than scientific content. They are learning how to be learners. They practice listening, asking questions, waiting their turn, solving problems, and working with others. When a favorite station is full, students learn to negotiate, share, and be flexible. These moments help develop the social and emotional skills that are essential for success both in and out of the classroom.

Perhaps the most special and important part of science education is sharing the wonder of the natural world. Children are curious, and their excitement is contagious. The natural world is endlessly fascinating and beautiful, and early childhood is a precious time of wonder in which our classroom is a place of joyful discovery and appreciation.

In the end, our goal is not simply to teach science facts. It is to help children develop curiosity, confidence, kindness, and a lifelong love of learning. As students progress past early childhood, and our science program grows skills, diversifies and deepens in content, and rises to meet new developmental needs, the lower school science team retains the priorities set in early childhood- strong and meaningful content, engaging methods to grow learners in a community, and the precious joy in the discovery and appreciation of the world around us.

Middle School Musings:

Growing Scientific Thinkers Through Strategic Curriculum Design

◆ By **Alexandra Brown**, Director of Upper School STEM



Science education is continuously evolving as new discoveries, technology, and practices emerge. To prepare students for an increasingly complex world, schools must ensure that science curricula remain current, intentionally spiraled across grade levels, and aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Steven Hawking famously said, “Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change.” This sentiment is kept in mind as we continue to review and refine the Middle School science curriculum to enhance and support the learning of all students in an ever-evolving world.

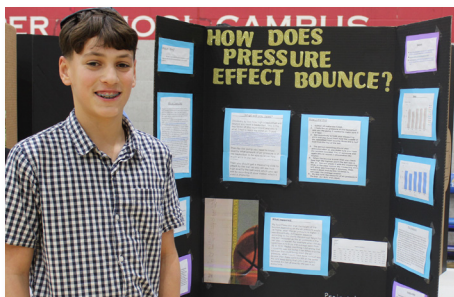
A modern science program is not simply a collection of topics taught year after year; it is a coherent learning progression that builds scientific understanding over time while engaging students in authentic scientific practices. The CESJDS Middle School program is designed for students to follow a trajectory of growth, focusing on Identity, then Community, and finally Action. Our science courses encourage students to become scientific thinkers, providing them with the foundational skills and knowledge required for scientific inquiry and fostering a love for science.

In 6th grade, students reflect upon the meaning of Identity. Science 6 supports this theme by allowing students to explore how everything from their cells to their organ structures contributes to their own unique identity. The year typically begins by using the characteristics of life to define living things, and then students explore different cell types and learn about human body systems. To better prepare students for authentic science engagement, the Science 6 curriculum will now also include explicit instruction about metric conversions, atomic structure, and the classification of living things.

Life Science 7 aligns perfectly with the grade-wide theme of Community. Students discover how biological communities form and function. In the ecology and environmental science units, students get to see how interconnected our world is. We recently added a unit focused on climate science to support interdisciplinary learning across Science and Humanities. The year also includes an exploration of genetics and evolution, the natural foundations for current biological communities. Students end the year with a deeper understanding of their role and connection to the natural world.

The 8th grade theme is Action. Physical Science 8 teaches students the basic principles of physics and chemistry. In addition to directly preparing them for High School level courses, these fundamental concepts allow students to better understand how the world around them functions. With a strengthened understanding of the natural world, students are empowered to make plans for action that are logical and achievable. Another focus of Physical Science 8 is experimentation. 8th grade students flex their experimental skills by participating in the Weinberg Family Science Fair, during which students conduct a scientific investigation, analyze their results, and communicate their conclusions.

Regular curriculum review ensures that instruction remains relevant and accurate and allows educators to incorporate emerging research on effective teaching, including inquiry-based learning, engineering design, and the integration of cross-curricular concepts. The goal of this constant revision is to ensure the best learning outcomes for students by increasing understanding and retention through meaningful learning experiences.



High School Highlights:

Beyond Memorization: A New Approach to Biology

♦ By **Melissa Andrew**, High School Biology and Ecology Teacher



Science at CESJDS is more than a subject; it is a foundational tool that shapes critical thinkers and engaged Jewish citizens. To study science is to study ourselves. Contrary to popular belief, science touches every discipline within our school's curriculum.

We see history and ethics in the legacy of Rosalind Franklin, a Jewish scientist whose groundbreaking X-ray image of DNA paved the way for a Nobel Prize, despite her contributions being ignored. We see advanced mathematics in the computational algorithms used to map the human genome, and the power of language in the writing skills scientists need to communicate life-saving research. By exploring these connections, JDS students learn that science is a lens for understanding the world. To ensure students are ready for this interconnected landscape, the CESJDS biology curriculum was recently updated.

Traditionally, biology has relied on rote memorization and endless vocabulary flashcards. While this helped students recall names, it rarely fostered a deep understanding. Our updated curriculum moves away from vocabulary drills, challenging students to analyze how biological systems function as a whole through phenomenon-driven learning.

Each unit begins with a real-life event or medical mystery. Students engage with this scenario, asking thoughtful questions that actively drive classroom discussion. They learn to analyze data, investigate through targeted research, and master practical scientific tools. Because the content is naturally relevant to their own bodies and ecosystems, student engagement remains high.

Once students understand the phenomenon, they are introduced to the technical vocabulary—giving complex words immediate context. Students then solidify their understanding through dynamic discussions, written assignments, and oral presentations. The best example of this approach is our end-of-year Honors Biology Project.

Honors Biology students finish the year by reading “A Molecule Away from Madness” by Dr. Sara Manning Peskin, which introduces medical case studies focused on genetics and heredity. Students dive deep into one chapter to research and present to the class. For example, one group focused on the genetic causes and cutting-edge treatments surrounding Huntington’s disease. Others investigated the biological mechanisms of an ovarian tumor, or explored Abraham Lincoln’s supposed use of “Blue Mass,” a mercury-based historical medication. Within these pages, students learn about the scientific method, bioethics, and the depth of knowledge required to solve medical mysteries.

♦♦ Science touches every discipline within our school’s curriculum. ♦♦

Biology should be a subject students want to sink their teeth into. True science requires critical thinking, data analysis, and thoughtful experimental design. Our new curriculum emphasizes our vision of encouraging students to be creative, confident, and compassionate thinkers, preparing them for the modern world.



Building the Future:

Alumni Spotlight Eric Silberg '95



For Eric Silberg '95, a lifelong curiosity about science and engineering has grown into a career at the forefront of technological innovation in the aerospace industry.

Today, Eric serves as Director of the Unmanned Aerial Systems Lab at the Naval Surface Warfare Center, Carderock Division, where he leads research, development, and drone operations supporting the U.S. Navy. Over more than 25 dedicated years at Carderock, he has helped advance emerging technologies, worked alongside sailors and Marines, and built a career centered on creativity, problem-solving, and discovery.

Eric's path began at CESJDS, where he attended from first grade through twelfth grade. He credits the school with helping him develop the skills and habits that prepared him for success long after graduation.

"The teachers helped me develop the work habits and strengthened my time management skills, which allowed me to do well in college," Eric says. "After my first few weeks in college, I realized quickly that JDS prepared me to be successful."

After graduating from CESJDS, Eric studied Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering at Cornell University. Internships at both NASA Goddard Space Flight Center and Carderock exposed him to exciting possibilities, but it was his experience at Carderock

that ultimately shaped his future.

Following graduation, Eric joined the organization full-time and later earned a master's degree in rotorcraft aerodynamics from the University of Maryland part-time while continuing to work in an industry he knew he was made for. Today, his team designs, tests, and evaluates unmanned systems, helping the Navy prepare for future challenges and opportunities.

Throughout his career, he has contributed innovations that have led to patents and numerous advancements in naval aviation and unmanned systems. "It's really cool to see your ideas become reality," he says. "To come up with something new and then see someone using it years later is incredibly rewarding."

Beyond his professional accomplishments, Eric remains deeply connected to CESJDS. A regular participant in STEM Day, he enjoys sharing his experiences with students and encouraging them to explore the many possibilities within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. He has also mentored CESJDS high school students and alumni at the college and graduate levels, helping young minds in our community discover their own interests and career paths within the engineering industry.

His connection to the school became even more meaningful when it came time to choose a school for his own children. "It was a really important part of my life," Eric says. "It was never a question whether I would send my own children to JDS. I thought it would be something meaningful and valuable for them, like it was for me."

Eric also credits longtime physics teacher Laura Jacobs with helping solidify his passion for science and engineering, setting him on a path that would eventually lead to a career of innovation and leadership.

As an engineer, inventor, mentor, parent, and proud alumnus, Eric exemplifies the lasting impact of a CESJDS education. His story is a reminder that curiosity, hard work, and a strong foundation can open doors to extraordinary opportunities—and inspire the next generation to pursue their own.

A Legacy of Learning, A Future of Opportunity



It is with profound gratitude that we honor the enduring legacy of Evonne and Elliot Schnitzer z”l, whose lifelong dedication to Jewish education continues to shape the future of the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School. Through the extraordinary generosity of Evonne and their children - Debbi Cooper (‘93), Rebecca Kotok (‘95), and Dan Schnitzer (‘98) - **The Evonne & Elliot Schnitzer z”l Endowment** has been established to provide critical tuition assistance, ensuring that a CESJDS education remains accessible and transformative for generations to come.

For Elliot and Evonne, Jewish education was not only a priority, but a deeply held family value. Their children’s journey at CESJDS, from kindergarten through graduation, reflected their unwavering belief in the power of day school education to nurture identity, community,

and purpose. This commitment is further honored through the naming of **The Evonne & Elliot Schnitzer z”l Dor L’Dor Intergenerational Day**, celebrating Elliot’s deep joy in learning alongside his grandchildren and witnessing Jewish traditions passed from one generation to the next.

We are deeply grateful to the Schnitzer family for their vision, generosity, and enduring partnership. Together with Evonne’s remarkable 34-year legacy as a beloved kindergarten teacher, this meaningful gift ensures that their passion for Jewish learning will continue to inspire and uplift our community well into the future.



“Be Kind as Omer”: A Legacy That Lives On

It is with deep gratitude that we announce the dedication of the **Omer Balva ’19 z”l Mehitzah Sepharadi Zman Kodesh** and the **Omer Balva ’19 Memorial Dining Hall** at the Annette M. & Theodore N. Lerner Family Upper School Campus.

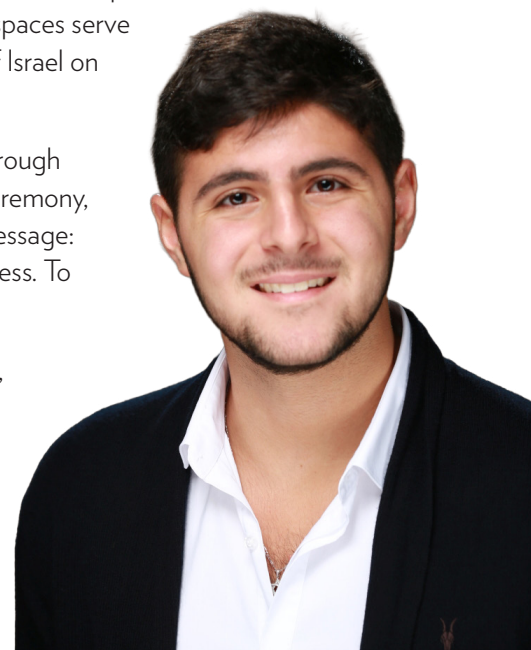
Made possible by a generous gift from the Balva family, these spaces serve as lasting tributes to a beloved alumnus and Staff Sergeant in the IDF who fell in defense of Israel on October 20, 2023.

Known for his warmth, humility, and compassion, Omer’s memory continues to inspire us through the guiding message synonymous with his life: “Be Kind as Omer.” During the dedication ceremony, Omer’s sister, Shahar ’14, shared words that beautifully captured the meaning behind this message: “‘Be Kind’ was created to preserve not only his memory, but his core values. To spread kindness. To choose empathy and not apathy. To care for one another, always.”

We extend our deepest appreciation to Eyal and Sigal Balva and Omer’s siblings - Barak ’10, Shahar ’14, and Itai - for their extraordinary generosity and partnership. Omer’s spirit will forever inspire future generations of JDS students and faculty.

Inspired to create your own legacy? To learn more about establishing a named endowment or contributing to an existing fund that matches your passions, please email

Amy Forseter, Major Gifts Officer, at amforseter@cesjds.org.



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

SEPTEMBER 1First Day of School

SEPTEMBER 3 Middle School Back to School Night

SEPTEMBER 7Labor Day - School Closed

SEPTEMBER 8 Lower School Back to School Night

SEPTEMBER 9 High School Back to School Night

SEPTEMBER 11 Erev Rosh Hashanah - School Closed

SEPTEMBER 12-13..... Rosh Hashanah

SEPTEMBER 21 Yom Kippur - School Closed

SEPTEMBER 26 - OCTOBER 1..... Sukkot



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