

Your child is grounded: why that's a good thing

Dina Shtull, special to the WJN

Grounding your child doesn't necessarily mean he has to spend the rest of the evening in his room. Grounding your child can mean that he or she will be given the confidence, knowledge, and critical skills needed to successfully contribute to and navigate a diverse modern society. This is what grounding means at the Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor (HDS). Sending a child to HDS has a private school price tag; yet many parents feel it is priceless. In deciding to enroll a child in HDS, how can a prospective parent determine how much the education is actually worth? How does one assess the value of a girl who excels at learning languages because she was immersed in a second language in elementary school? How does one assess the value of a student who, in a literature class, can quote Biblical references?

Hebrew Day School recently conducted a survey as well as personal interviews of parents of preschoolers to explore views on Jewish education. Most parents are serious about their child's Jewish upbringing. Some parents value religious training; others focus more on the importance of practicing Jewish traditions, values and ethics. But all want their child to grow into a confident, proud, Jewish young person who will be successfully navigating our diverse modern society with its multiple and varied opportunities.

Some parents wanted to achieve this vision while enrolling their child in public school. Others wanted to opt for a Jewish day school education. They believed that through this type of schooling, they will most likely succeed in raising deeply-grounded, proud, and successful learners who, upon graduation, will contribute to a diverse world in a uniquely Jewish way. They believe that a Jewish day school offers the best education because it is immersed in the Jewish intellectual and ethical tradition—an education measured not in annual tuition, but in a myriad of unique experiences such as performing a play in modern Hebrew or questioning a passage in Biblical Hebrew. Parents who choose to spend their hard earned dollars on this kind of education often speak about TVMs—Tuition Validating Moments. “There have been many of them,” says Peretz Hirshbein, Assistant Director of the JCC's Early Childhood Center, whose daughter came home from Tappan middle school and thanked him and his wife Laura



HDS Graduates, Class of 2009
Left to Right: Danielle Turner, Avishag Eliav, Maya Burgard

for having sent her to HDS. Abigail says: “My Jewish friends who did not go to a day school, don't really want to talk about being Jewish. I do.” Abigail also commented about her ability to befriend Muslims and children from other ethnic background. “They are like me,” she said (referring to their similar experience of being immersed in a culture).

How does a child who attends HDS excel academically, emotionally and socially in the comfort of the school and still remain a citizen of the world at large? Why is this formula worth the tuition? There are five main reasons.

HDS nurtures each and every child and provides unparalleled individual attention. Through its RTI system (Response to Intervention), a team of teachers and support staff meets regularly to discuss both the functioning of each class as a whole and the functioning of each individual child within that class. Services are provided to either advance or boost a student in a particular area, and progress is monitored closely. Every teacher knows every child, and every child knows every child. No one falls through the cracks. HDS parent, Jen-

nifer Siegel, describes her experience: “Each of my two daughters has a distinct learning style. HDS teachers customize learning opportunities that are sensitive and effective. My girls are celebrated for their uniqueness. They receive personal attention that ensures success and builds self-esteem.”

The curriculum that follows local and national standards is complemented with Jewish content, helping students identify with and participate in a proud intellectual tradition of questioning and analyzing that results in outstanding critical thinking skills. The day is infused with values on a daily basis, immersing children in Judaism's proud ethical tradition.

Each child is given the gift of a second language, and a language that is not only the primary language of the Bible, but one that also opens door to employment in high tech and international marketing. Israel is second only to North America in the number of companies listed on NASDAQ.

Children become deeply grounded and confident young people who feel comfortable with themselves, and proud enough of their Jewish identity to be part of a diverse world in a uniquely Jewish way.

Day School graduates tend to excel in their various pursuits. One recent graduate recently

won a national competition in web-site design (as part of a team of African-American students). Another student won a national writing contest sponsored by a Scholastic children's magazine. An HDS alumnus was the speaker at his University of Michigan graduation ceremony.

As families begin planning for their preschooler's entry into kindergarten next fall, the following checklist may be helpful:

Is your child's intended school a nurturing, caring, warm environment, where every teacher and administrator knows every child?

Does the school have a stellar reputation in critical thinking—in math, reading, writing, bilingual education, arts, and science?

Will your child develop a sense of comfort with her/ himself, a strength that flows from years of deep grounding in a personal identity based on values and ethics from his/her own tradition?

Will your child speak a second language by the time she/he approaches middle school, ensuring success in foreign language acquisition?

Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor is offering private tours for those who want to find out why families are choosing HDS for their children. Call 971-4633 to schedule a visit, find out more information about financial aid or learn about the HDS full day kindergarten. ■

Habonim Dror activities are just heating up

Yael Warshai, special to the WJN

The local branch of the Habonim Dror youth movement, Ken Pardes, ended last semester with a bang. About 30 kids aged ten and up attended the Chanukah party in December, complete with a messy *sufgania* (donuts) eating contest and silly theatrical performances of the story of Chanukah. The Ann Arbor group was joined by some new faces as well as their Detroit counterpart, the Ken Afikim youth group branch.

Also, about 10 local leaders just returned from the national leadership convention in the Pocono Mountains of Philadelphia. They brought back a renewed vigor and excitement for the semester to come and everyone is looking ahead to this summer at Camp Tavor,

which is located near Three Rivers, Michigan.

Youth group activities to come this semester include the annual Winter Olympics, where members will once again join with Ken Afikim in a series of friendly competitions in the snow. In addition, the older and younger kid sleepovers, and a promising new Tikkun Olam project are just around the corner.

For more information about Ken Pardes and Habonim Dror, contact Yael Warshai at yaelw07@hotmail.com or Ron Sussman at ronsussman@aol.com. New participants from ages 9–15 are always welcome. If you are interested in information regarding the summer camp, email Kate Sandler at registrar@habonimdror.org.