

HUC-JIR is poised to continue its important role in helping Jewish day schools fulfill their potential as one of the most powerful ways to insure Jewish continuity. As a result of a significant grant from the AVI CHAI Foundation, the Rhea Hirsch School of Education will continue *Jewish Day Schools for the 21st Century*, a groundbreaking project designed to enhance the effectiveness of Reform and liberal community day schools across North America.

The 1990s has been the decade of the “continuity crisis” in the American Jewish community, spurred by the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey and its inter-marriage statistics.

Researchers, policy makers, and professional and lay leaders in the Jewish community have spent much of the decade trying to identify ways to insure the Jewishness of the next generation of American Jews. In survey after survey, one factor repeatedly proves to have a dramatic impact on the levels of Jewish observance, participation in synagogues and other Jewish organizations, and other measures of Jewish identity: attending a Jewish day school as a child.

The Reform Movement was late in joining the move towards offering day school education as an option. While the first modern

Jewish Day Schools for the 21st Century

A groundbreaking project designed to strengthen Reform and liberal community day schools across North America



Children, parents, and grandparents studying together at Temple Beth Am Day School in Miami, one of the first Reform Jewish day schools and a founding participant in the first stage of Day Schools for the 21st Century.

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American day schools opened during World War II and the first Conservative day schools began in the 1950s, Reform Jews did not sponsor day schools until 1970, when Temple Beth Am in Miami and Congregation Rodeph Sholom in New York opened full-day elementary schools. The Reform Movement did not formally endorse Jewish day schools until the 1985 UAHC Biennial in Los Angeles.

The Rhea Hirsch School of Education has taken a leading role in encouraging and supporting Reform Jewish day schools since 1985. The first meeting of representatives of Reform day schools in the wake of the UAHC’s approval of day schools was held on the Los Angeles campus of HUC-JIR in 1986.

In the late 1980s, the Rhea Hirsch School conducted a Certificate Program in Day School Leadership to re-train congregational educators and day school teachers to serve as heads of day schools. More than a dozen graduates of this program went on to head day schools, and four new Reform day schools were created by this group of professionals.

More recently, the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, in partnership with PARDeS, the association of Reform day schools, sponsored Day Schools for the 21st Century (DS21). This pilot project was designed to help



Students preparing for Purim at Temple Beth Am Day School in Miami

schools reaffirm their responsibility for building a vibrant future for the Jewish community while they provide high quality general and Jewish education to their students.

Temple Beth Am Day School in Miami was one of the participating schools in DS21. A broad group from the school community, including teachers, administrators, parents, and board members, identified the school's core Jewish values, developed a broad consensus about the school's mission, and initiated a series of programs to translate that vision into action. Parents are now asked to sign a *Brit Ketana* (a mini-covenant) when they enroll their children in the school. They promise to share responsibility with the school for the Jewish education of their children by attending adult Jewish learning programs and providing a Jewish home environment. The school also initiated a series of family education programs to support families in their quest to create a lively Jewish home for children.

In a trail blazing move, Beth Am Day School along with Jacobson Sinai Academy, a Reform day school sponsored by Temple Sinai for North Miami Beach, and another DS21 school, created a Jewish certification program for classroom teachers. As the schools move towards creating an enriched Jewish program for children and their par-

ents, more is being asked of teachers. In order to help teachers fulfill these new expectations, the schools have taken responsibility for helping teachers learn more about Jewish tradition. With the cooperation of the local Central Agency for Jewish Education, Beth Am and Jacobson Sinai now require teachers who teach math, social studies and language arts to learn about

Jewish holidays, history and prayer so that they can play a significant role in creating the Jewish environment of the school.

The Rashi School, the Boston area's Reform Jewish day school, also participated in DS21, as did community day schools in Minneapolis and Marblehead, MA.

The new program which the Rhea Hirsch School of Education began this fall will build upon the success of DS21. Eight elementary Jewish day schools will be invited to join Jewish Day Schools for the 21st Century. These schools will be guided through a process of discerning their guiding Jewish values, developing community consensus around these values, and planning a series of programmatic initiatives to translate these values into programs for children and adults in the school community. As the schools go through this planning process, they will also learn the skills that will enable them to become Jewish learning communities and Jewish learning organizations: Jewish text study which enriches deliberations around the school's values and programs, and reflection on current realities and future possibilities.

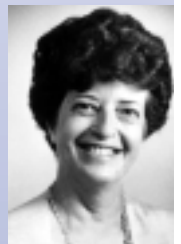


Dr. Michael Zeldin

Jewish Day Schools for the 21st Century is directed by Dr. Michael Zeldin, Professor of Jewish Education at HUC-JIR/Los Angeles. Dr. Zeldin is a national authority on

Reform day schools, and has expertise in the process of institutional change and curriculum development for Jewish schools. He is joined by Professor Sara S. Lee, Director of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, who serves as Senior Advisor to the project. Professor Lee is a leading expert on organizational development and institutional transformation.

The AVI CHAI Foundation, established and endowed in 1984 by Zalman C. Bernstein, z"l, seeks to encourage the growing Jewish Day School movement in North America through grants assisting in



Professor Sara Lee

marketing new high schools, interest-free loans for facility improvements, advanced training for educational leaders, start-up libraries for students transferring to Jewish high schools, special programs assisting new day school students to catch up with the Jewish knowledge of their peers, and testing innovative ways of reducing the costs of Jewish schooling.

"We are delighted that HUC-JIR will continue to build on the success of the DS21 project. Day schools are having a measurable impact on our children's Jewish future, and DS21 will help strengthen the Jewish educational environment in many schools. We applaud those schools and the parents, educators, administrators, and lay leadership who are participating in this important program."

Henry Taub, AVI CHAI Foundation Trustee