



KAYITZ 5775

SUMMER 2015

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## YOM HA'ATZMAUT: INDEPENDENCE DAY

On Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day, the Preschool turned the building into a Kibbutz. First, the children 'boarded' a plane for Israel, then they went on a tour of the country by visiting different classrooms. In one room the children made pita, in another they put notes into the Western Wall, in another they went 'swimming' in Eilat. **ABOVE:** Israeli flag decorations. **ABOVE RIGHT:** milking a cow. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** picking fruit; **BOTTOM LEFT:** squeezing orange juice.





on my mind

# Getting Dirty

This year, we experimented.

Specifically, we asked our teachers--and students--to take risks, both inside and outside of the classroom. This newsletter is about problem-based learning: digging into a topic, getting dirty, and having real-world consequences. Learning that sticks. In 5th/6th grade, for example, History teacher Joe Esse designed a grade-wide simulation of class warfare in Ancient Rome, pitting Plebeians and Patricians against each other. Four-year-old Afternoon



Explorers completed their study of birds by building nests that could hold an egg. In 3rd/4th grade, Mrs. Esse's students learned about propaganda in advertising and designed their own line of cereal boxes. In Humanities, our new 7th/8th grade hybrid course, students

**ABOVE,** from left: Shaina, here with her brother Spencer, performed at the U of C's Logan Center to raise money for autism. Shira Friedman-Parks advanced to History Fair nationals with her website: [www.TK.com](http://www.TK.com)

spent the last weeks of school deconstructing messages of beauty. As their "textbook," they examined cultural artifacts like magazines, commercials and toys.

This kind of learning cultivates independence, resourcefulness, and creativity far beyond school. Just take Shaina Grossman (6th), who spent the last six months organizing a dance performance to raise money for Autism. There are no fundraising classes at Akiba, but Shaina simply picked up the phone, wrote letters, and shared her vision.



Or, look at Shira Friedman-Parks (7th), who decided she was interested in a little-known woman named Josephine Cochran, and built a website to educate us about her. That website was **one of 70 selected from 10,000** Illinois History Fair projects to compete at Nationals.

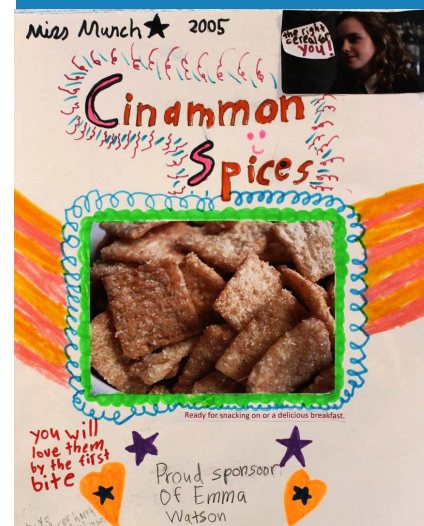
Should I keep going? Meet alumna Devora (DD) Klionsky (Class of 2011), who, upon graduating from Walter Payton College Prep, is scrapping the Ivy League route and instead attending a start-up university that is, in itself, a real-world problem-based solution.

Risks can be scary. The guidelines aren't predetermined and the teacher doesn't hold the answer. Sometimes we hold our breath and hope for the best. But that's what it's like to do something you're proud of in this thing we call education.

*Miriam Schiller*

## CEREAL-SAVVY

Students in Mrs. Esse's 3rd/4th grade learned the techniques of propaganda associated with advertising. Where to start? Breakfast cereal! After learning the main advertising techniques (bandwagon, testimonial, etc.) students designed their own cereal boxes. Then they met with advertising experts who critiqued their products.



'One of the most important things we can do with our kids is to get them to think for themselves,' says Mrs. Esse. 'They are already negotiating a world in which everyone is trying to get them to vote, buy, act, and even think in ways that spin-experts tell them.' If effectiveness is measured by enjoyment, then the unit was a wild success. But, Mrs. Esse counters, the real measure is: can the students think critically? You decide.

**ABOVE:** A cereal is aligned with Emma Watson, and thus more appealing.

## alumni profile

Q&gt;A

DEVORA KLIONSKY  
ON PIXIE DUST AND EDUCATION

What do you do when you're graduating from high school, are the youngest of four, have watched all your siblings attend top-tier 200-year-old universities, but you don't find yourself excited by any of it? Answer: Get into the Minerva Schools at KGI, a start-up institution created by entrepreneurs stationed exactly nowhere, in which students spend each year in a different country and take classes called 'Multi-modal Communications' and 'Complex Systems.' In other words, start from scratch. Which is exactly what Devora Klionsky (2011), better known as 'DD,' did.

**Q> What made the decision for you?**

**A<** The people and conversations. On other college visits, people asked, 'Where are you from? What extra-curriculars do you do?' At Minerva we skipped that stage. Everyone was already talking about the things they care about and want to be talking about for the next four years--and all the years after. There are a lot of things that make sense to me about Minerva that didn't make sense to me for the last four years.

**Q> As the 2nd class, you're sort of a guinea pig. No brand yet. Right?**

**A<** Between my siblings having gone to the more established institutions and me having been at [Walter] Payton, I already know what that model looks like. I'm not terribly worried that there's something I would get from a traditional college that I wouldn't get from Minerva. And the same things that are scary, are also exciting. I'll be the guinea pig? Terrifying! I'll be a guinea pig? Awesome.



DD visits San Francisco, where she will spend her first year, with Minerva students.

**Q> How has Akiba prepared you for this next phase of life?**

**A<** When I got to high school and started realizing that no one else went back to grade school to visit, I also realized that teachers at Akiba were much more willing to do things that weren't in the existing model. If this way doesn't work, you try another. That was my model. Then I got to high school and realized it wasn't anyone else's. The whole reason Minerva was started is, this isn't working. Let's find a way to do it better. That was Akiba.

**Q> What do you think education should look like, at its best?**

**A<** People learning. So, for example, something happened in 3rd grade where people who didn't like to read had

this crazy teacher [Mrs. Esse], and then they liked to read. Something happened there. Whatever it is, if we can put that in a bottle, that's what it should be. It's pixie dust of some sort. Let's find out what it's made of and who makes it. And if you can systematize it, well, that's what Minerva's trying to do.

**Q> The Big Question: what do you want to be when you grow up?**

**A<** Seriously? Good to people. Kind. Articulate.

**Q> Top 3 adjectives on how you're feeling about the next phase of life?**

**A<** Curious. Scared. Excited.

*The Minerva Project is part of the Minerva Schools at Keck Graduate Institute.*

“It was really beautiful to see the way that the teachers and children were partners in learning in the classrooms of Reggio Emilia,” says Preschool Teacher Arun Srimani. Thanks to a generous donation by current and alumni parents towards professional development in the Preschool, Arun, along with longtime Preschool teachers Kelli Harris and Susan Carton, went on a study tour of Reggio Emilia in Italy in March. “We felt so privileged to be able to offer this opportunity to our staff,” says Preschool

Reggio-Inspired Learning means creating a classroom where the learning is meaningful, intentional and visible. The environment is seen as the third teacher in the classroom; natural materials and elements are added to reflect the

to construct their own learning was inspiring,” Kelli reflected after the trip. “I have no doubt that this kind of education provides young children with the best possible start to their academic futures. Reggio children develop crucial executive functioning skills and gain confidence in their own abilities, all the while doing it in the way that comes most naturally.”

Akiba-Schechter will use what Arun, Kelli and Susan learned in Reggio Emilia to further deepen the Preschool’s commitment to letting the children’s explorations set the course for what happens in the classroom. Reflection is a big part of that. Kelli says, “We plan to adjust the way we use our planning time, spending more time reviewing what happened, looking for possible meanings, and less time planning activities in advance. Our goal isn’t to become a Reggio Emilia school; we want to find ways to incorporate the practices and approaches that resonated the most with us, while preserving the ideals that have made our Preschool shine for over 30 years.”

Director Carla Goldberg. In fact, a grant was recently secured to underwrite a different group of teachers visiting Reggio Emilia again next year, as well as mentor other schools in this philosophy.

The Preschool staff has been studying the Reggio Emilia philosophy of early childhood education for years and the opportunity for this study trip arose out of their participation in the Reggio Emilia-focused workshops they had been taking through Columbia College.

outdoors. According to Susan, “Reggio schools believe that the materials are powerful enough to engage children’s minds, bodies and emotions. The freedom of thinking of those children brought amazing results in their creativity and capabilities.”

“The level of trust teachers in Reggio place in the ability of children

**ABOVE:** Inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, our Preschool classrooms, such as the Yellow Room here, aim to bring the outdoors inside by featuring natural materials such as wood, baskets, fabrics and plants. **RIGHT:** Susan and Kelli pose in Reggio Emilia in front of the International Building.

## INSPIRATION IN ITALY EXPLORING REGGIO EMILIA



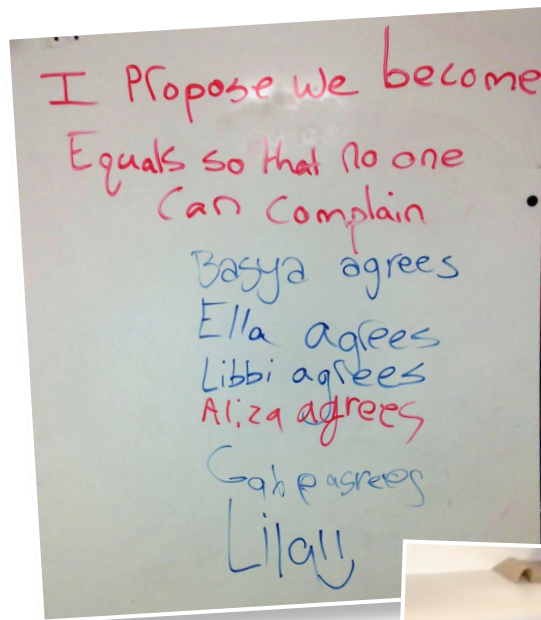


# POWER PLAY

## Patricians + Plebeians Fight for Control

When you're 10 years old and live in a democracy, it's hard to empathize with those who don't. That's why, when 5th/6th grade History teacher Joe Esse wanted to teach his students about Roman political structures, he opted for a more experiential route. He assigned his students roles as Patricians and Plebeians, gave them tasks to accomplish, created a political framework in which to accomplish them, and then surrendered his authority as teacher.

"Instead of reading about how Roman government worked," says Mr. Esse, "how and why there was conflict



proposal, either passing or vetoing it, imitating the Century Assembly. The only catch? The votes weren't exactly weighted equally.

"I expected the students to discover that the rules were set up to heavily favor the Patricians while the Plebeians did a majority of the work," says Mr. Esse. Some did, immediately, and the protests took different forms. One Plebeian used civil disobedience by laying down on a table that needed to be cleaned. Despite the others trying to pressure her to move, she refused. Another Plebeian staged a verbal protest, but was unable to get anyone to join him. The most successful protest came when about 1/3 of the class initially opted out and then decided to actively work against those who

were attempting to complete the task by hiding needed equipment.

"It was also interesting to see how tyrannical some students became when they had power. Several students, when elected



Consul, sat in their comfortable chairs and yelled at the others to work." Students fell right into their status roles.

The simulation ended when the Plebeians realized that by uniting and refusing to do the assigned task—otherwise known as going on strike—they could regain power. The simulation was followed by several days of debriefing and introducing relevant concepts: democracy, tyranny, republic, class, revolt, power, authority, aristocracy, and civil disobedience. Armed with these analytical tools, students could look back at the simulation and unpack it—including the most difficult question of all: why their teacher refused to exert his authority.

"These lessons are now deeply ingrained in the kids' memory," says Mr. Esse. "They learned abstract concepts in a real way that allows them to better access and understand their world." Besides, he adds, "The goal is to engage in learning that sticks. This clearly made the mark."

### 5 VOTES, 19 ROMANS

- Vote 1: The wealthiest Patrician
- Vote 2: Two wealthy Patricians
- Vote 3: The three remaining Patricians
- Vote 4: 7 Plebeians--the merchant class
- Vote 5: 12 Plebeians--farmers and laborers

between Plebeians and Patricians, and how those conflicts got resolved, I thought the students would learn much better by just experiencing it for themselves."

But how to do it? For five consecutive days, every 5th/6th grader took part in a simulation. Students were divided into Patricians and Plebeians with Plebeians far outnumbering the Patricians. Each day, Patricians elected two new Consuls. The day's tasks were announced and no parameters were given, only that the task had to be complete by the end of the period. Prizes were dangled as bait, but the Consuls had control over how these prizes were distributed. The students would vote on the Consuls'

# Building a Nest



**ABOVE:** Afternoon Explorers were challenged to create wire nests that could support eggs.

How do you create a nest that will hold at least one egg? As part of their year-long study of birds, our four-year-old Afternoon Explorers set about figuring this out. Through trial and error and problem solving, the children tackled the challenge. In true Emilia Reggio fashion, they then described the experience to their teachers, dictating their observations. To quote one of them: "I used the metal wire and the copper wire. I twisted around the cup and made a circle. Then I twisted the copper wire around the metal wire" (Louisa). Of course the eggs were handmade, too.

The result was an elegant tree that graced the preschool stairway for many weeks this winter. Made of twigs and decorated with the children's delicately wrought-wire nests harboring colorful clay and model magic eggs, this tree was jewelry on display and brought a bit of spring into our grey winter days. These nests were not only incredible works of art, they were also great examples of how our preschool teachers believe children are capable and competent in the work that they do.

# Eye of the Beholder

Have you ever counted how many times a day you look in the mirror? Our 7th graders have. As part of a 2-week Humanities unit that deconstructed pop culture's messages about beauty, students examined both the sources of messaging and the techniques employed to spread it. The intention? Empower students to think positively about themselves by giving them conceptual tools to understand what they see around them, instead of falling prey to it.

"It was obvious that this was something they were already interested in," says Humanities teacher Neil Landers. "Everything we put in front of them, they found immediately relevant." Like what? Magazines, TV commercials, toys like Barbie and Batman, stiletto heels, popular films, social experiments like the Kenneth Clarke Doll Experiment, and case studies of different versions of beauty through history. Students even learned about other



cultures' wildly opposite versions of beauty--such as Chinese foot-binding.

For every artifact the students examined,

they had to comment on the class blog, where they often shared their own artifacts. "It was gratifying to see the students thinking about things that permeate their everyday lives," says Mr. Landers. "Things most adults don't even think about."

**LEFT:** Isabel and Sarah examine Barbie dolls as part of the beauty unit. Students also analyzed the toy's packaging.

## SCOPE & SEQUENCE

### Inside Humanities

The 2-year Humanities course is designed to take students from questions about **IDENTITY** and how it's constructed, to the **INDIVIDUAL** and his **ROLE IN SOCIETY**, to subcategories of **"WE" AND "THEY"** (stereotypes, scapegoating, racism, bullying), to **JUDGEMENT** and **MORAL DECISION-MAKING**, and finally the question of how we can best **PARTICIPATE IN SOCIETY** to make it better.



# BY THE NUMBERS

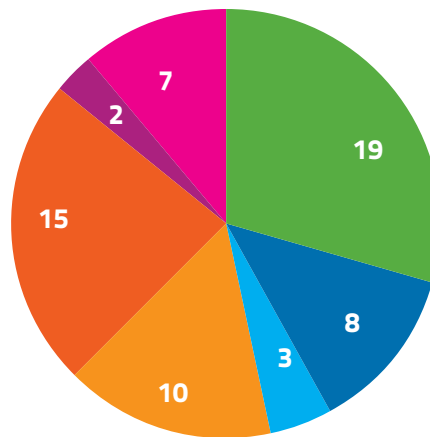
Mazel tov to this year's graduates: **Goldie Blisko, Naomi Hochman, Liam Jankelovics, Leah Kanter, Gavriel Levy, Lilit Matar, Anielle Nudelman, Margalit Roitman, Oryah Rudick, Sarah Stine, Jacky Taylor, Samantha White, and Bina Wilens.** They will go to the following high schools: Hannah Sachs Bais Yaakov, Walter Payton College Prep, Northside Prep, Ida Crown Jewish Academy, The Chicago Academy for the Arts, Kenwood Academy, the Naala Program in Israel, and Jones College Prep. Other schools to which they were accepted but will not attend: Lane Tech High School, University of Chicago Laboratory High School, and Beacon Academy.

## IN THE PAST 5 YEARS...

### ACCEPTANCE RATES

- 13/19 students who applied to CPS selective enrollment high schools were admitted to their 1st choice: Payton, Jones, Northside, or Whitney Young.
- 6/7 students who applied to the U of C Lab High School were accepted.
- 100% of students who applied to Jewish high schools were admitted to their 1st choice.

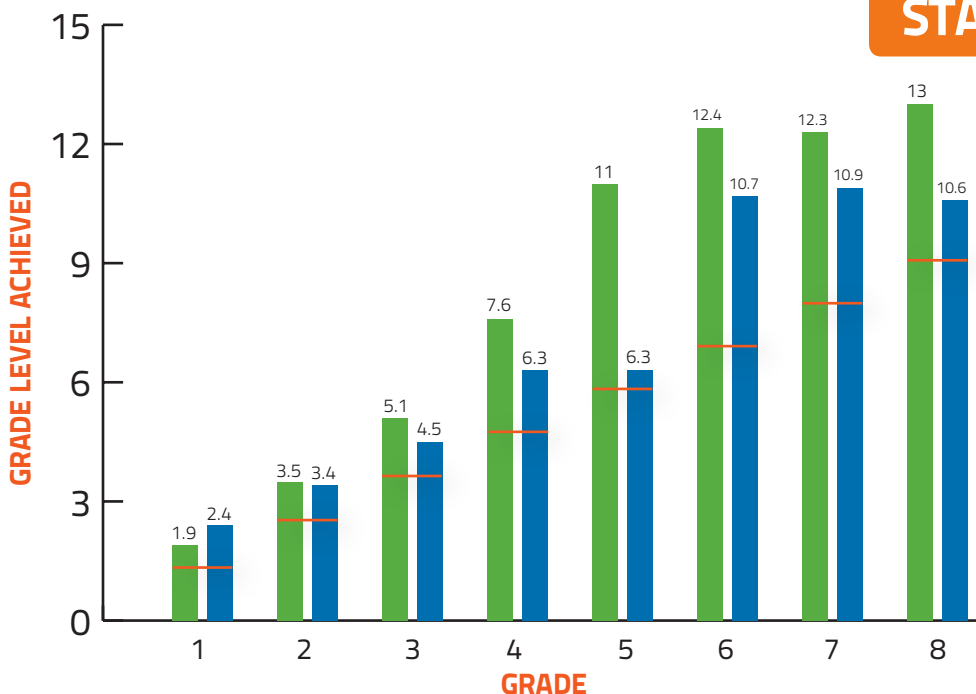
### ATTENDANCE



- Ida Crown Jewish Academy
- Chicagoland Jewish High School
- Fasman Yeshiva High School
- Hannah Sach Bais Yaakov
- CPS Selective Enrollment\*
- U of C Lab High School
- Other

Numbers represent students, not percentages.

## STANDARDIZED TESTING



Akiba-Schechter administers the TerraNova tests to students each year. It is a norm-referenced, nationally standardized achievement test administered to students across the country, with norms set to the time of year in which the tests are taken (in this case, the .6 mark). This makes the appropriate grade equivalent to the grade level plus .6.

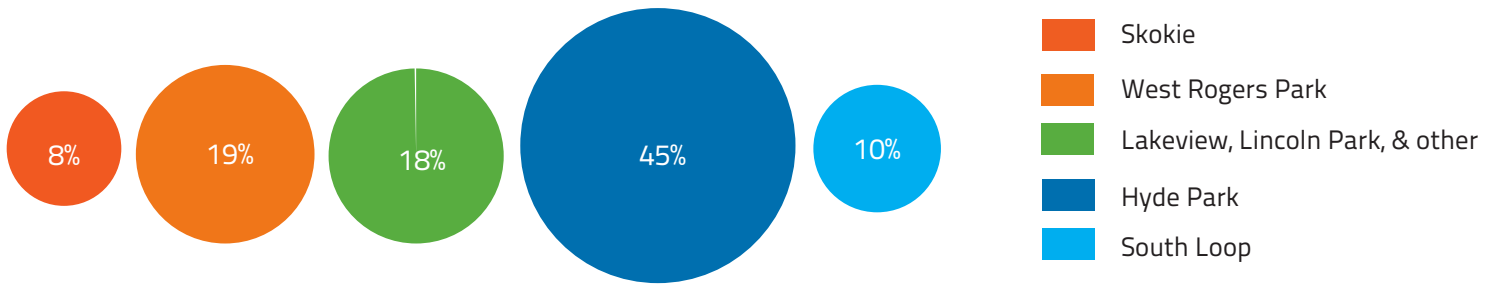
- National Average
- ASJDS Reading Composite
- ASJDS Math Composite



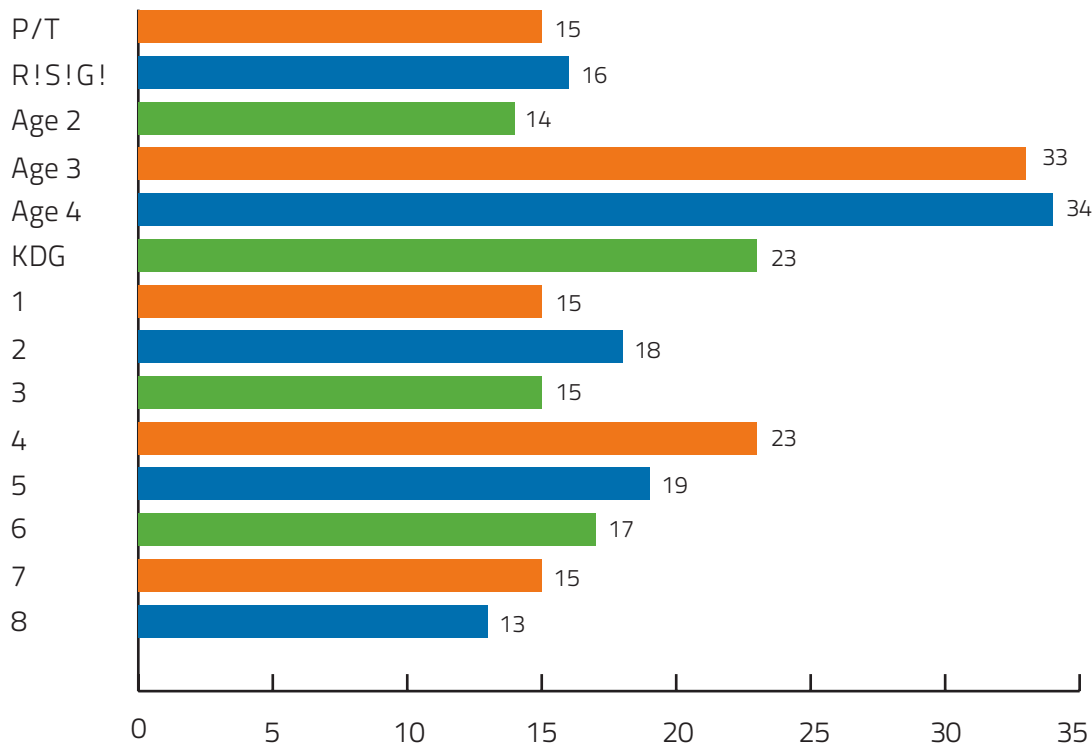


During the winter, Kindergarteners decided that they wanted snow friends who would not melt. So, they made their own from clay, named them, and wrote stories about them. Pictured here are Snow Fairy Snowy, Red Ted and Princess Elsa.

## STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



## ENROLLMENT BY GRADE



NUMBER OF STUDENTS (Total: 270)



As part of their Chicago Unit, 3rd/4th graders studied architecture and city planning. Then, they researched a specific building in the city, took the rest of the class on a tour and served as a docent, built a model of the building, and presented their findings at the Chicago Fair. **RIGHT:** The Board of Trade.



# MULTI-AGE CONNECTIONS

One of the core parts of an Akiba-schechter education is participating in a community. That's one of the major benefits of our multi-age philosophy. Myriad opportunities abound: The Buddy Program, a one-on-one relationship between oldest and youngest students; Lag B'Omer Color Wars, a full day of games in which teams are composed of students from every age and directed by 8th graders; and Purim, in which the 7th/8th graders design, stage and run a carnival for the entire school. Programs like these cultivate some of the most important skills we can teach our students: empathy, active participation in the world around us, and leadership.



**TOP:** 8th grader Gavi Levi at Rosh Chodesh breakfast with his Buddies. **LEFT:** A 1st grade Buddy works with her Preschool Buddy. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The red team completes a task during Lag B'Omer Color War.

# Measuring Success

This year, as in 2013, Akiba-Schechter was pleased to take part in an extensive parent survey, to which 74% of households responded. The purpose of the survey was to measure our perceived performance and quality, create benchmarks against which to measure future performance, and see how we have changed since we first launched this survey seven years ago. The survey was conducted entirely by the independent, third parties of Measuring Success and the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE). In consultation with the administration, Measuring Success chose eight peer schools similar to Akiba-Schechter in both niche and size for an even closer benchmarking. Here is what we're proud of: We ranked **#1 IN CRITICAL THINKING,**

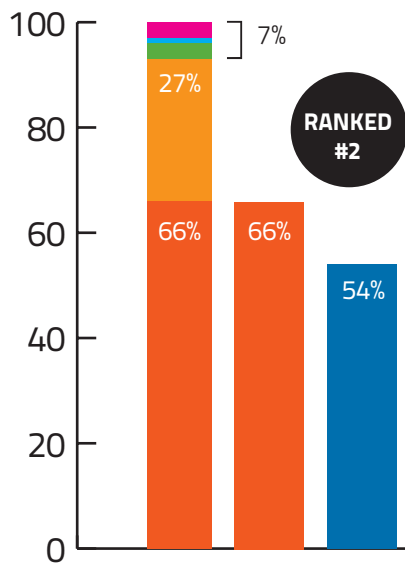
with 92% of parents rating us as either good or excellent. We also ranked **#1 IN RESPONSIVENESS TO PARENT CONCERNS,** with 89% of parents rating us as good or excellent. We ranked **#2 in 'ACADEMIC PREPAREDNESS,"** with 90% of parents thinking we were good or excellent in History, 89% in Language Arts, 84% in Math and 82% in Science. We also ranked **#2** in parents' **LIKELIHOOD TO RECOMMEND** us to prospective parents, which is the largest predictor of recruitment and retention.

But we also have room for growth: 80% of parents agreed that Akiba supports their families' Jewish development, and only 62% agreed that we are using technology effectively.

## PROMOTER

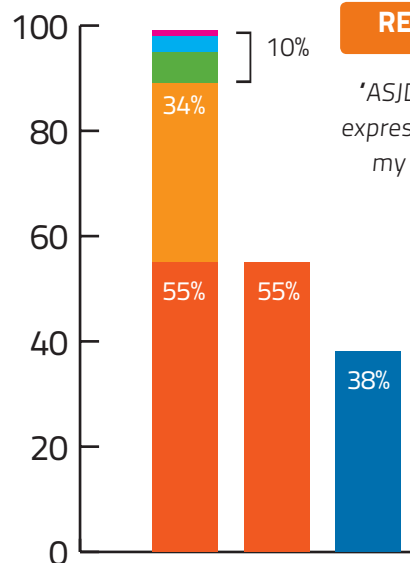
*"I would recommend ASJDS to other Jewish families I know"*

We increased from 61% to 66% strongly agree



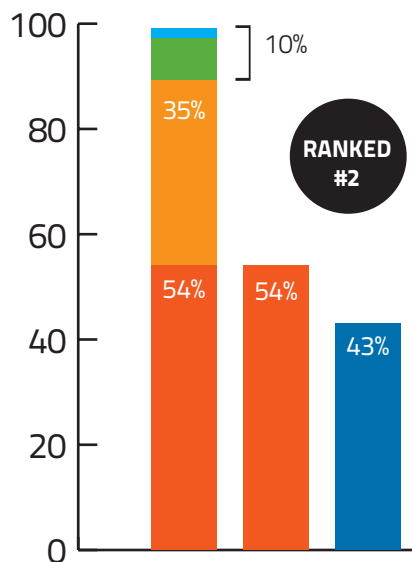
## RESPONSIVENESS

*"ASJDS is responsive to expressed concerns about my child's progress."*



## ACADEMIC PREPAREDNESS

*"Graduates are academically well-prepared for their next school environment."*



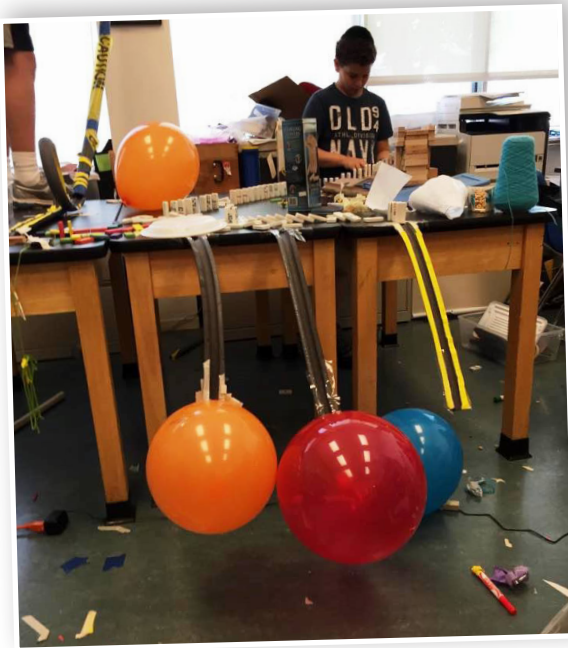
## LEGEND

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree
- peer group

All numbers represented in percentage



Akiba-Schechter Jewish Day School  
5235 S. Cornell Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60615  
[www.akibaschechter.org](http://www.akibaschechter.org)



**LEFT:** Students in Ms. Rotfeld's 5th/6th grade Science class wrapped up their year of studying motion and forces by building Rube Goldberg machines, contraptions that involve multiple chain reactions to accomplish a mundane task, such as popping balloons to pour a bowl of cereal.

## MATCH Your Money

We are pleased to announce an exciting opportunity for parents, grandparents and all supporters of Jewish day school. Akiba-Schechter has been selected to participate in the latest round of MATCH, a matching grants program generously funded by The AVI CHAI Foundation and Crown Family Philanthropies. **For every \$1 donated to Akiba, we will receive an additional \$0.50 in matching funds, a 1:2 match ratio.** Gifts may be in the form of cash, (checks or wire transfers) or transfers of publicly traded stock and be at least \$5,000 to be eligible. This is a wonderful way to increase the impact of your gift to Akiba. Your support will go even further in promoting our academic excellence and creating the stimulating and innovative environment fundamental to our success in inspiring, challenging and nurturing our students as they build a foundation for a lifetime love of learning. Please call 773.966.1068 for more information. Applications for matching funds must be received by Monday, November 2, 2015. MATCH funding is available for gifts to Akiba pledged and paid between February 2, 2015 and December 31, 2015. We look forward to your call!

**RIGHT:** 3rd-8th grade students performed Mary Poppins as their annual musical. There were two performances, both held at Kenwood Academy.

