

Hebrew Day School adopts “Common Core” academic standards

Dina Shtull, special to the WJN

Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor has three main goals for this academic year: adopting new Common Core State Standards (CCSS), expanding student use of “Twenty-first century skills,” and further developing the collaborative culture in the school.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were recently adopted by the Michigan State Board of Education. They are a set of rigorous, college and career-ready curriculum standards



adopted by 44 states across the nation, Washington D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands. “The HDS documented academic standards are mostly in line with these nation-wide common standards,” says Jennifer Rosenberg, a former HDS teacher and professional development consultant who will be joining the HDS faculty this year to support teachers in the exploration of the standards. “Nevertheless,” Rosenberg shares, “we aim to examine alignment, determine any gaps, as well as opportunities to go beyond these standards.”

The Common Core initiative involved governors and state commissioners of education, as well as teachers, educational experts, parents,

and school administrators who were informed by other top performing countries, internationally benchmarked standards, and the highest standards across the country. The standards reflect real world requirements, the reality of the classroom, the global economy, and the society in which children are being raised. Content was written for math and language arts; reading recommendations for science and social studies were also incorporated. The use of media is an important tool embedded in the standards. The Common Core provide the academic content; it is up to the school to determine how to teach the standards.

“Developing twenty-first century skills is a particular focus of the Common Core Standards,” explains Carol Gannon, technology teacher. “When we prepared for the new school year, we discussed two aspects of these skills—learning and innovation skills (e.g., critical thinking, communication), and life and career skills (e.g., responsibility, flexibility). Our lessons will incorporate these necessary skills.”

Teachers also discussed how the language arts standards interrelate with the school’s grade-level Hebrew goals. “The Common Core Standards were not developed specifically for foreign language instruction,” says Hebrew/Judaics teacher, Aron Kaufman. “Yet there are connections to be explored that will further integrate and reinforce the Hebrew and Judaic Studies curricular goals we are already teaching,” Kaufman continues. “The goals are theoretical, but also practical and reasonable,” says new Hebrew/Judaics teacher Aaron Magid.

“They provide a focus for a new teacher, both on a daily basis and for the whole academic year.”



The Common Core Standards will also be integrated into the school’s curriculum called “specials” — that is, music and fine arts, physical education, and library. For example, instruction on reading music notation integrates a lesson on dividing whole numbers; reading music requires students to understand the relationship between different lengths of notes and how these notes divide and complete a measure. In addition, the math standards expect students to “look for and make use of structure.” Students study the structure of music, that is, the repetition and changes in a melody. “Students use these structures to better understand the music, and for ease in learning the material,” says Debbie Gombert who teaches recorder to the 4th grade and directs the school’s Klez Kids Band.

A foundational piece for the successful adoption of the Common Core State Standards at HDS will be the school’s collaborative culture. Teachers will support their colleagues by together

analyzing each other’s student work and observing each other deliver live lessons. The teachers have been practicing the skills necessary to feel comfortable opening up and sharing. “They needed to be reassured that this process is supportive, not evaluative,” says Head of School Dina Shtull. “We are all trying to help children, and we are helping each other help those children,” Shtull adds. During orientation week, teachers practiced habits of communicating, beginning with the skill of pausing (for reflection) and paraphrasing (evidence of listening), and moving on to the skills of inquiring and probing for further clarification. “Ultimately, the process of adopting the new Common Core Standards is for us, together, to reflect on individual student learning and on how



classroom instruction impacts on that learning,” says Jennifer Rosenberg.

For more information about the Hebrew Day School, contact 971-4633. Day tours for parents are scheduled for Tuesday, November 15 and Thursday, January 12. Open houses for parents and children to explore kindergarten are scheduled for Sunday, December 4, and Sunday, January 22.