

the spark

An Illuminating Quarterly Curated by Bornblum's Leadership Team



Daniel R. Weiss, Head of School

Innovation & Inspiration

Welcome to The Spark, Bornblum's new quarterly newsletter. Within these pages, you will find a deep dive into the incredible world that is Bornblum Jewish Community School. Our goal is for you to experience the spark that drives our leadership team and faculty to innovate and excel in every aspect of the school.

Why The Spark? The answer is simple. Light is symbolic of knowledge and every light begins with a spark. Our job as educators is to inspire our students, to light a spark in every child. That spark of inspiration turns into a flame of curiosity, encouraging our students to search for answers and

discover all that the world has to offer. And when they leave Bornblum at the end of eighth grade, these amazing students will no doubt light the sparks of all those around them.

This issue of The Spark focuses on the core of our school's mission—the outstanding education we provide. Get to know Jill Cross, our new Director of Curriculum & Instruction whose engaging and hands-on leadership expands educational innovation every day. You already know Sally Baer, but do you know what she is doing in her updated role as Director of Student Services and Assistant Head of School? See her vision for social emotional learning and the effect it is having on our students' academics as well as their social and emotional well being. Finally, experience Bornblum's Judaic learning through the eyes of its Judaic Studies Principal, Michal Almalem.

B'Shalom,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daniel R. Weiss".





Jill Cross, Director of Curriculum & Instruction

Meet Jill

As one of the newest members of our leadership team, Jill brings a wealth of knowledge and creative strategies to Bornblum.

Jill is a Nationally Board-Certified Teacher and ASCD Emerging Leader with 18 years experience in public, charter, and independent schools. In 2010 Jill spearheaded the movement to transform a public elementary school in Jacksonville, Florida to the 11th Museum Magnet School in the nation. Since then, she has served as curriculum director in several independent K-12 schools. Jill has coordinated the development of curriculum in public and private schools and frequently presents across the country on teacher leadership, object-based learning, partnership cultivation, personalized professional learning, and curriculum writing. Her passion is supporting teachers, providing the systems and structures to plant seeds of change that have the capacity to transform education.

As the Bornblum's Director of Curriculum & Instruction, Jill oversees curriculum development, works with faculty to coordinate curriculum throughout the school, reviews and selects texts and learning materials, and communicates with parents. She also provides professional development opportunities and instructional resources for faculty.

From Jill's Desk

As a newcomer to Bornblum this year, I was immediately struck by the sense of community I found here, a community that extends beyond the walls of our school building. It is clear that this sense of community is the core of this school. And at the center of this core is our faculty.

I am endlessly impressed by the professionalism of our teachers. I watch them pivot to meet the needs of our students. I am in awe of the thoughtfulness of their lesson plans. Each day I see how constraints have engendered creativity and resourcefulness in our building. It is this transformative learning that makes me proud to be a part of this learning community.

In the next few pages, I will introduce you to the richness of the education Bornblum students receive, as well as provide a window into where our curriculum is going. First, I spend a little time explaining our educational philosophy, and then describe steps we are already taking to make our academics even more rigorous, in math, technology integration, and enrichment.

My virtual door is open and I would love to hear from you any time.

Beginning with the End in Mind

As educators, we continually explore new methods of teaching and learning to enhance our professional practice. Many times, it is the result of self-reflection and questioning that leads us to explore new strategies and initiatives.

This year, I am focusing on asking solutions-oriented questions. Rather than making a fixed statement, I'm adding the phrase, "How might we..." to any problem statement. This system of inquiry empowers me to focus on the present while looking to the future.

Right now, there is no escaping a focus on the present - temperature checks, health screenings, social distancing guidelines and quarantine protocols. This is our present and the minute-by-minute decisions that must be made by our faculty, parents and leadership team firmly root us in the "now." During this time it might be easy to lose sight of the future. But as an independent school, and in order to stay relevant, we need to

actively and deliberately examine our curriculum to ensure it is meeting the needs of our students, not only during COVID-19, but every year. That means strategically looking ahead while also examining our current practices.

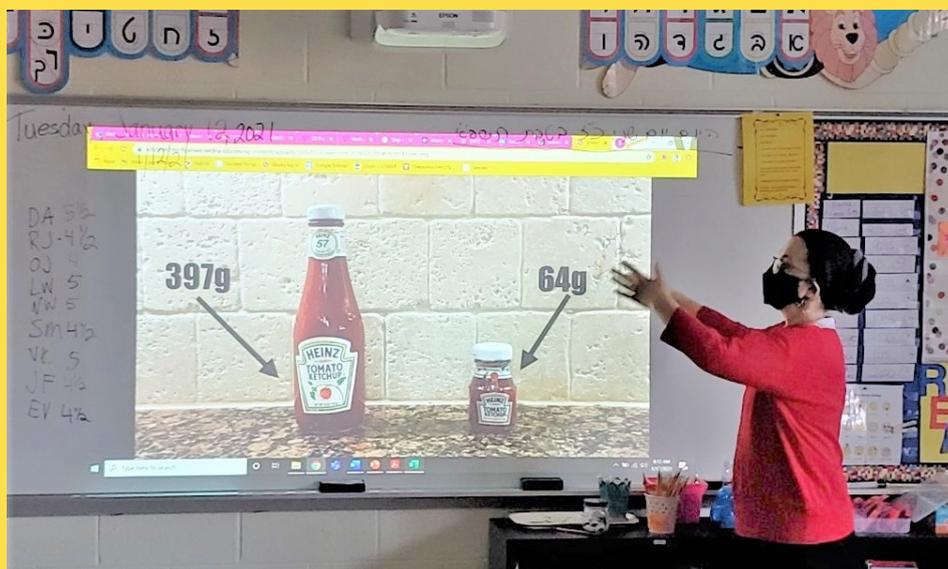
At Bornblum, we believe great teaching and learning is rooted in true understanding and deep learning. Our curriculum design and delivery are focused on developing and deepening student understanding, not only through content mastery, but also through application. The path to understanding is rich and complex, requiring that our teachers and students have clarity about the outcome of learning. Beginning with this end in mind, we are engaged in a curriculum redesign process. This will be an ongoing, collaborative effort, laser focused on our students' needs and what a Bornblum graduate looks like.



Mapping Math Curriculum

In math, we are working to align our curriculum scope and sequence in middle school and further articulate what our students should know and be able to do at the end of each school year or course of study. This includes differentiating our advanced courses from grade-level courses.

We are also critically examining our curriculum, looking for gaps and overlaps and opportunities to incorporate authentic, real-world assessment tasks for students to show what they know. As part of our updated curriculum maps, we will have Bornblum specific standards of learning - learning objectives that are unique to our school, require a greater level of rigor, and incorporate technology to allow for conceptual understanding. This work will continue with other grades in the spring. Starting with our oldest students and working backwards will help us build a deliberate path to understanding so students leave Bornblum fully equipped for higher-level math classes in high school and beyond.



Knowing that next year, we need to adopt a new math curriculum series, we have used this opportunity to explore new teaching strategies in all grades. Many classrooms have begun using 3-Act Math Tasks as a tool for learning. These whole-group mathematical tasks provide students an opportunity to practice effective problem-

solving skills in a contextual, concrete, and visual way. 3-Act Math is meant to spark curiosity, allow students an opportunity to inquire and apply prior knowledge, make connections, and consolidate new ideas. Because these tasks are focused on inquiry, with students unlocking information and asking new questions with each video “Act” of the task, they are naturally engaging and relevant. This kind of math learning encourages students to dig into the math and not just repeat rote procedures. If I see a class doing a 3-Act Math Task, I make it a point to pop into the classroom to listen. When I see our students excited and participating in a rich discussion focused on math and mathematical predictions, I am reminded of the importance of integrating inquiry into all we do.

*Make the most of yourself
by fanning the tiny, inner sparks of possibility
into flames of achievement.*

- Golda Meir



Technology Integration

How might we take the essence of teaching and learning at Bornblum and reimagine it for a pandemic world?

A few months ago, I told our teachers we were making history. We are part of an educational renaissance and every day we are all learning together. This shift has been happening for years, but the pandemic has crystallized the need to focus on student empowerment, integrated, and authentic learning.



At Bornblum, we are working to find the right balance of tradition and innovation during this unprecedented time. We are on a journey to stay true to the core of who we are while also embracing the change that is required of us in this moment. As I consider what our teachers are taking on this journey, the bags they packed for teaching and learning, I see the through-lines of our mission to create critical thinkers who are intellectually curious and socially responsible.

Anticipating that our teachers could be teaching some or all their students online this year, we introduced a variety of digital learning tools to our faculty. The goal in doing this was to provide our teachers ideas and resources that would allow them to incorporate 21st century skills like creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking. We highlighted tools that could increase student engagement and provide an element of choice. The focus was not on the application, but on how digital tools can be used to elevate traditional learning experiences.

“
The pandemic has crystallized the need to focus on student empowerment, authentic learning, and integrated learning.”

If you were to visit our classrooms today, you would see that each teacher is using the digital tool that makes the most sense for his or her learning objectives. In Middle School it's not unusual to see our students participating in Nearpod lessons. Nearpod is an interactive presentation tool providing embedded assessment, live response capability, and engaging media elements. In Lower School you might see teachers using Kahoot, a web-based application that allows teachers to create game-based learning activities for challenges or review.

This year we cannot invite as many people into our building as we would like. In some of our younger grades, teachers and students are using Seesaw to strengthen the home-school partnership. Seesaw is a digital portfolio tool that offers a way for students and parents to have a visual reference of learning. When a child adds a new post to their journal, like a photo, video or drawing, parents are automatically notified. Students are encouraged to verbally reflect and comment on their learning within the platform. Their digital portfolio is a story that represents learning and students practice vital digital citizenship skills. Seesaw becomes a window into the classroom for parents when in-person visits aren't practical.



A Beginner's Guide to



GENIUS HOUR



Carve out one hour for students to determine their own learning path.



Brainstorm ideas.



Create an inquiry: a big question that isn't easily Googleable.



Interview experts, gather research and document sources.



Convert idea into a reality.



Share what was learned and what was created with the world.

In our Enrichment Program, we are working on refining our classes to encourage exploration, creativity, intrinsic curiosity, and lifelong learning. The Enrichment Program is designed to provide challenging, thought provoking activities for all students at Bornblum Jewish Community School. The program works on many levels, including school wide activities and programs available to all, enrichment projects for those who like a challenge, and pull-out enrichment classes for students who meet school criteria. Students in enrichment classes are working on an individualized plan of instruction based on their academic goals and ability level.

This year, they are also participating in Genius Hour each week. Genius Hour is a teaching practice that is student-directed and gives students the time and space to explore a passion or learn something new. Genius Hour is most notably associated with Google, where employees can spend up to 20% of their time working on projects they are interested in and passionate about. Gmail and Google News are both products of 20%-time initiatives. With Genius Hour, study and work are motivated intrinsically, not extrinsically.

I was lucky enough to be in the fourth and fifth grade enrichment classes when Genius Hour was introduced to students. Learning Spanish, studying exhibition design and museum studies to create an art exhibit, and learning about law to participate in a mock trial are just a few ideas our students are exploring during Genius Hour. It is also a wonderful opportunity to engage alumni as the students will need to interview professionals as part of the learning process and present their ideas to an audience this spring.

Genius Hour is another example of the forward-thinking, dynamic, and innovative education students receive at Bornblum.

It's not that I'm so smart. But I stay with the questions much longer.

- Albert Einstein





Sally Baer, Director of Student Services & Assistant Head of School

Sally is an integral part of our school, having been at Bornblum since its inception. With a degree in Early Childhood Education and a master's in Educational Leadership, Sally has been an educator for the last 40 years, having taught multiple generations of Jewish students in Memphis.

Moving from the classroom to administration 15 years ago, Sally currently serves as the Assistant Head of School. This year Sally's role has expanded to include responsibilities as the Director of Support Services, overseeing the well-being of students' learning and behavior and ensuring every child's individual needs are met.

Further, she facilitates problem-solving with students, parents and teachers when a student is struggling with self-management, organization or study skills. Sally works collaboratively to develop learning plans and behavior plans as needed for students who need academic challenge or academic support.

throughout the day provides a model for your children to experience an emotionally healthy year to come.

We know that some of our students are experiencing greater levels of stress and anxiety than in a typical school year. They also read the stresses the adults in their lives have. But I can tell you that our children are quite resilient. It is exciting and invigorating to see how well many of the children have dealt with wearing masks, keeping distance, and constantly sanitizing hands, tables, books, and playground equipment.

Will all of the problems disappear with the end of the pandemic? I would expect not. Challenges were present before and will continue to be afterwards. Building life skills now to help us manage through these difficult times will help for years to come. Working together with students, parents and faculty in a focused effort toward recognition of needs, resilience, and empathy is the goal I set for myself and will continue to pursue with passion in my role here at Bornblum.

Sally Baer

Social Emotional Learning

I sometimes marvel at how time passes both quickly and slowly. The number of days since we have gathered together openly and without restrictions seems like so very long ago. And yet, the days pass quickly in school because our children and faculty are together safely and continue learning and creating new experiences as a school community. How are we doing it? And, more importantly, how are we doing? We have gotten to this point through more preparation, research, thought, and networking than ever before.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is a key component in providing a support tool for our students and a key component in my role.

Each of the SEL skills is important to address more than ever in these challenging times – when we need it the most. Bornblum teachers have joined professional development sessions on how to support our children using SEL and continue to have individual conversations with our school counselor, Vanessa Akeredolu and me. We all work collaboratively to ensure that our children build resilience, empathy, self-confidence, and countless other skills to use right away and throughout their lifetimes. The children learn these crucial skills through morning check-ins, breathing techniques, and formal SEL lessons.

The morning messages this year are recorded by our middle school students and faculty for everyone else to watch. They help build leadership and start the day on a positive note school wide. Much of my day, every day, is spent talking with children and helping them identify tools to take one step at a time, recognize challenges, and celebrate every success. Teachers reach out to me daily when they recognize a child who needs to talk.

Daily check-ins are focused on self-reflection with students expressing how they are feeling, what has been happening for them, and what goals they may set for the day. Similar check-ins with your family and friends may be helpful as well. Verbalizing how you feel, why and what you plan to do with that

SEL INCLUDES:

- strategies for recognizing personal needs and emotions
- striving to get needs met and emotions addressed
- heightening awareness of the needs and emotions of others
- developing strategies for building interpersonal relationships with others
- making physically and emotionally healthy decisions

throughout the day provides a model for your children to experience an emotionally healthy year to come.

Judaic Studies



Michal Almalem, Jewish Studies Principal

While this year brought many new challenges, it also is providing a ton of excitement and growth to our school. This year gave us the opportunity to explore some areas of Judaic Studies from new angles and do things a bit differently with our students. We have added new components to our curriculum and let students work more independently. We have incorporated more contemporary teaching styles and new processes.

We were headed there in small steps, and then coronavirus came. It was apparent we had to spend the summer brainstorming how we would manage prayers, lunch and recess, exploratory time, and school programs. And with these topics to tackle, thinking out-of-the-box was a necessity for every area of our school. We had the opportunity to apply to Legacy Heritage Fund's Teacher Institute for Innovation and were accepted into the program which combines developing teacher leadership with instructional innovation.

Morah Hershkovitz and I had planned to lead a new curriculum of Israeli songs reflecting Jewish text. Singing was not an option anymore, given the CDC's COVID-19 guidelines, but Jewish text was! So we shifted to Megalim Tanach – Discovering the Bible. It seemed that this year would be perfect to expand our students' knowledge of important Biblical texts, wise and courageous figures, and inspiring places from those texts that had not yet been part of our school's curriculum. Learning about these figures enriches our students and gives them a broader and deeper perspective of Jewish history and their identity.

Our goals in teaching Megalim Tanach are clear. We want students in all grades to become so familiar with Bible verses and expressions that they will be able to easily identify them and use them every day. We want our students to learn from our Biblical leaders and to see that none of them was perfect or had it easy, but that they still demonstrated leadership - and so too can our students. We want them to discover that the Bible is pluralistic, and we want them to apply the values, morals, and messages to their lives, to our situation today in 2021.

We also added units about King David, King Solomon (also Kohelet), the Temple, Amos, Isaiah and more to our revised curriculum. The learning is interactive, including virtual guests, visual projects, storytelling, and games.

Students explore the Holy Temple in Jerusalem starting with a teenager praying by the Western Wall today going all the way back to the tabernacle in the desert. Students then react to the learning by responding through arts to the parts they found the most fascinating.



“ We want our students to discover that the Bible is pluralistic, and we want them to apply the values, morals, and messages to their lives, to our situation today. ”

Some students created a model of the Temple using recycled materials, and some designed a picture using colorful paper. Others made a mobile of the parts of the building, carved it in clay or painted it on canvas.

While learning about King Solomon, students had a virtual guest in their class who is an expert in storytelling. Morah Hershkovitz created a set of important stories about the king, accompanied by slide shows. The students could not wait for the next story about the wisest man in the world.

In middle school students explore Ecclesiastes (Kohelet), which was written by King Solomon. They see how the man who built the Temple and had all the riches and wisdom one could ask for, would define at the end of his life, that being alive, healthy and cheerful in a Sukkah is the key to real happiness.

Learning about the prophet, Amos, on the other hand, became an inquiry into global issues of social injustice, which the UN is also exploring. After sharing the different challenges we face today, we went on a journey to the Kingdom of Israel in the time of Amos and saw how, as King Solomon famously said, "There is nothing new under the sun."

In conjunction with our twin class in Shoam, the 8th grade class is preparing to explore social injustice issues in Memphis and Israel. They will learn through Amos and contemporary challenges how we still need to work hard to heal the world.

Megalim Tanach will continue through the second semester. Students will get to know more figures like Eliyahu Hanavi in the Tanach and the Midrash, and several prophets in the time of exile and the return to Zion to build the second Temple. The Project will end with an art exhibit that will be shared with our community. Stay tuned for more learning, and for an invitation for the exhibit in a few months.

Mehal Almdaleu

