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Akiva School embraces continuity and change

The principles fostered by Rabbi David Hartman, founder of Akiva School in 1968, continue to inspire children in kindergarten and elementary grades to value their Judaic heritage and alliance with Israel, cherish learning, as well as connect with the Jewish and secular community here and beyond.

Students benefit from Akiva's co-educational two-stream grade system, digital tools, advanced teaching methods and facilities. Each child receives social/intellectual enrichment and individual attention.

"Rabbi Hartman created a unique Jewish day school reflecting his philosophy that happy children, who are motivated and supported by a community of teachers and engaged parents, will thrive in school," said Cooki Levy, interim head of school. "As part of our founder's vision, Jewish and secular studies supported each other, and learning was done through a Jewish lens based on Judaic values. For more than 49 years, our school has been a pioneer in new educational initiatives, all the while staying true to these founding values and vision."

A prime mover behind Akiva School since 1988, Levy has played a key role in its development, innovation and success.



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Learning was done through a Jewish lens

Akiva School students work on an electrical circuitry plan for a house.

AKIVA SCHOOL PHOTO

She praises parents and the entire pedagogical team for their dedication.

"We promote independent, creative thinking, anchored in Jewish values and a strong Jewish identity," Levy explained. "Educational research in the 21st century supports the late Rabbi Hartman's learning incentives." Akiva focuses on the whole child by striving to meet each student's academic, intellectual, social and emotional needs.

"Our teachers are at the centre of our learning," she observes. "Akiva is a strong proponent of professional development, and students benefit from their teachers'

acquired skills and enlightening techniques."

Akiva's innovative programs include a strong STEM focus, a Mind and Movement program incorporated into the curriculum, Meaningful Judaic, and enriched French studies. The latter innovations boost the students' literacy and appreciation of English, French and Hebrew. This school year, Akiva will introduce a new set of tools for Hebrew in grades five and six.

The new French program focuses on language acquisition, enabling students to thrive in French in Quebec. Akiva recognizes French language instruction as

an integral component in the curriculum. The school's commitment flourishes this fall with programming that highlights critical discussions as well as exciting events and extracurricular activities in French.

The comprehensive STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) provides students with effective life skills. Akiva students work on stimulating projects such as designing electrical circuit plans, or planning parking lots.

Akiva is the first Jewish day school to incorporate a mindfulness program from kindergarten to Grade 6. Akiva's Judaic programming incorporates technology and project-based work for authentic Jewish learning.

Akiva School in Westmount is a co-ed kindergarten and elementary school for students with English language eligibility. The languages of instruction are French and English. For students without English eligibility the language of instruction is French. ■

Akiva School open house will be held on Wednesday, Nov. 8. For more information, visit the school website at www.akiva-school.com.

School libraries serve as special havens for students

ELAINE COHEN

SUPPLEMENTS CO-ORDINATOR

The tools are different today and students have more ways to access information but the challenge for parents and teachers is to teach students to do more than turn to Google or Wikipedia, says Montreal high school librarian Deborah Novack

Novack, who retired in June after more than 30 years in the public system, says "Students must be knowledgeable because it takes a critical eye to evaluate the material, not just copy and paste."

She stressed the importance of seeking truth, referring to multiple sources and respecting intellectual property.

"The catch phrase today is alternate truth and it's so easy to fall into it. Students still need to consult relevant print books, comprehend what they are reading, draw their own conclusions and put text in their own words."

Novack believes a school library is special. It caters to a specific age group, and the material must support the curriculum plus appeal to students. Furthermore, if it's an IB (International Baccalaureate)

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The library serves as a safe haven to do their own thing without being judged.

school, it must support the IB philosophy. "For many children, the library serves as a safe haven to do their own thing without being judged."

As a working mother of two daughters, one in medical school and the other a recent graduate of University of British Columbia, she empathizes with mothers jug-



High school librarian Deborah Novack reflects on a productive career. ELAINE COHEN PHOTO

gling households and careers. She recalls attending an orientation meeting when her children started elementary school. The principal's message resonated and she repeated it. "If you do nothing else, read to your children, and when they get older have them read to you and let them see you reading. Have reading material in

the house."

Novack credits her mother, a school librarian, for telling her to take typing lessons in the 1970s in order to assume a summer job preparing the library for the fall term. Those were the days before personal computers, the Internet, social media and smartphones, so touch typing proficiency was essential.

When it came time for university, Novack applied for law and library science at McGill. She opted for library school because they accepted her first. "After a year of library studies, I was hooked," she says.

She attained a master's degree in library science from McGill University in 1981. She served as librarian in various elementary and high schools, and at Laurier Macdonald High (EMSB) for the past 29 years.

Regarding retirement, she will miss the daily interaction with students and staff. "Right now, it's not apparent. I'm used to taking off for summer holidays but it will probably hit me this fall."

An avid skier, jogger, and exercise buff, Novack looks at the positive side. "It will be fun to wake up a bit later and attend a Y gym class when it's still bright outside on a winter day." ■