

## Curriculum Review Process – Overview

May 2011

### Our Mission

Seattle Jewish Community School provides an excellent, egalitarian K-5 General and Judaic education that promotes Jewish identity and practice, respect for diversity, responsibility for our world, and lifelong learning.

### Achieving our Mission

We use a three-phased cycle of quality to pursue, achieve, and maintain robust fulfillment of our mission. The phases are:

- I. Planning and Baseline Assessment
- II. Implementation and Monitoring of plan
- III. Evaluation and Standardization of best practices

Curricular assessment is the ongoing responsibility of the Head of School and faculty. Curricular assessment considers SJCS's mission-driven goals in light of local and national standards; curricula in other independent and public schools; current best practices and research; and, the needs of our student-body.

Each year, the Board of Trustees tasks the Head of School with a work plan that includes key deliverables. During the 2010-11 school year, the Head's work plan included review of our existing math and Hebrew-language curricula. The focus on these two areas was based upon faculty input as well as data derived from the 2008-09 PEJE/Measuring Success Parent Survey.

### Phase I – Planning and Baseline Assessment of Math and Hebrew

A similar process was used to consider both math and Hebrew-language. Shoshi Bilavsky (Head of School) and Chrys Hunstiger (Director of Curricular Activities /Learning Specialist) worked with General Studies faculty to assess math and with Judaic Studies faculty to assess Hebrew-language. The process included:

- Review and refinement of philosophy and mission-driven goals
- Review and assessment of current programs and curricula available in the marketplace
- Review of available programs in light of brain-based research, best practices, local/national standards, and curriculum used by area independent and public schools
- Goal of consistency and continuity for students in our K-5 program
- Consideration of the specific needs of our student-body

## Hebrew Review and Adoption

May 2011

### Objectives of the Review

Review and reflection about the Hebrew-language program began during the 2009-10 school year under the direction of then Head of School Debbie Butler. Head of School Shoshi Bilavsky continued the process with the Judaics Studies faculty beginning during the current school year. The objectives of the Hebrew review process were to:

- Identify and adopt a curriculum based on brain-research principles for student learning and language acquisition principles that included excellent instruction materials and teacher training
- Provide ongoing relevant professional development commensurate with the Hebrew curriculum for teachers
- Implement a multi-strand K-5 curriculum, consistent across all grades, supported with new textbooks, technology, and other instructional materials as necessary
- Improve our ongoing review of student output and assessment data to inform teaching decisions for students, class instruction, and professional development plans
- Enhance differentiated instruction and in-class support to become more responsive to learners across the spectrum, including those needing support or extension/enrichment

### Outcome – Tal Am Adoption, beginning in 2011-12

SJCS will adopt the Tal Am program for Hebrew instruction because we found that Tal Am aligns with our mission-driven goals of lifelong Jewish literacy and engagement. Tal Am is a unique curriculum of Hebrew Language Arts and Jewish Studies geared toward students in 1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grades. We will adopt the Tal Am language instruction program in 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grades. This research-based program rests on the principles of language development and learning patterns. Tal Am is used widely across North and South America, including in our local Jewish day schools. SJCS successfully piloted Tal Am in our 1<sup>st</sup> grade this year.

The Tal Am program is based on the notion that the best learning environment for children is one in which knowledge is acquired through a variety of activities, using each of the five senses. In addition to studying from textbooks, students use music, games and visual aids to learn the Hebrew language and to develop a keen understanding of Jewish concepts and values. Students develop their Hebrew and heritage literacy in a gradual and spiraled process, building new ideas and concepts a top an expanding foundation of knowledge. By making the study of Hebrew and Judaism relevant to students' everyday lives, the program enables them to develop a true appreciation of their heritage and understand the need for continued, lifelong Jewish study.

Visit [www.talam.org](http://www.talam.org) to learn more about the Tal Am curriculum, development, underlying theories, and outcomes.

## **Tal Am Implementation**

**May 2011**

### **Pilot – July 2010 – June 2011**

SJCS received a grant from the Avi Chai Foundation enabling 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher Miḥal Stern to attend professional development last summer in preparation for piloting the use of Tal Am in her classroom. Miḥal's ongoing training included mentorship throughout the year with a Tal Am master teacher who observed in the classroom and worked with Miḥal to deepen her understanding and implementation of this program. We thank the SAMIS Foundation for its support of this mentorship. Professional and parental assessments have been overwhelmingly positive during the pilot year. 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher Jeff Stombaugh joined Miḥal for continuing Tal Am professional development at a national conference held in January 2011.

### **Professional Development**

All lead Judaic teachers will receive training this summer in preparation for implementing the Tal Am program in the coming year. Additionally, the Head of School will focus on continuing professional development opportunities for the team and for individuals with the goal of deepening each teacher's knowledge of and use of this school-wide curriculum.

### **Tal Am in the 2011-12 Classroom**

Throughout the summer, we'll be purchasing and organizing materials that will support Tal Am instruction. Since Tal Am relies upon all the senses, expect to see a classroom environment that is evolving to support this learning.

As noted, we are adopting Tal Am for Hebrew-language instruction. During these lessons, you'll hear the teachers speaking more Hebrew – and, you'll begin to hear the students speaking more Hebrew. We understand that conversational Hebrew is a priority for many parents, and we believe Tal Am will move us in the direction of providing a stronger conversational foundation for students. It is important to note that English will still be used as part of Judaics instruction and that adoption of this curriculum does not imply immersion.

### **Evaluation and Standardization**

During this school-wide pilot year, we will continually evaluate and reflect upon our process. We anticipate using a significant portion of meeting time to reflect and evaluate as a group, and the Head of School will be spending time in the Tal Am classrooms to support teachers in what will most certainly be evolutionary change and growth. This commitment to learning, implementation, and revision/growth is central to our mission of lifelong learning and exemplary of a faculty commitment to model this for students. We will also be soliciting parent feedback, both informally and via survey(s).

## Math Review and Adoption

May 2011

### Objectives of the Review

SJCS has used a variety of math programs throughout its nearly twenty-year history. By and large, teachers have had autonomy in creating grade-level curricula that coordinate with overall goals and outcomes. There are strengths to this approach, and the outcome has been that SJCS graduates are extraordinarily well-prepared for their next level of math instruction at a wide variety of independent schools (including Jewish day schools) and public schools (including highly capable programs). Even with our successes, we felt that a school-wide review was appropriate. The objectives were to:

- Develop a strong, clearly-articulated vision of excellent mathematics instruction
- Implement a multi-strand K-5 curriculum, consistent across all grades, supported with new textbooks, technology, and other instructional materials as necessary
- Improve ongoing review of student output and assessment data to inform teaching decisions for students, class instruction, and professional development plans
- Provide ongoing relevant professional development commensurate with the math curriculum for teachers
- Enhance differentiated instruction and in-class support to become more responsive to learners across the spectrum, including those needing support or extension/enrichment

### Outcome – Everyday Mathematics Adoption, beginning in 2011-12

The General Studies faculty along with the Head of School and Director of Curricular Activities /Learning Specialist drafted a math philosophy statement that considered current brain-based research and our mission. Next, the team established criteria for reviewing math programs. From its local and national research, the faculty selected four programs for final review that included input from consultants, publisher presentations, feedback from other schools, direct review of materials, and site visits to see programs “in action.”

Based on its review and in consideration of the overall strong abilities of the SJCS student-body, the team decided to adopt Everyday Mathematics as a school-wide curriculum in 2011-12 and to continue to supplement the curriculum to ensure computational fluency for all students.

Everyday Math, like almost all math programs, has both proponents and detractors. Given the volatility and strong opinions about math, extra care was taken to consider all points of view on this curriculum. Everyday Math was ultimately selected for SJCS because it:

- Is academically rigorous and ambitious in its pace – and is therefore, a good fit for an SJCS student-body that skews towards the middle and high end of math students
- Has proven, evidence-based success
- Fosters flexibility of thinking and problem-solving
- Utilizes multiple modalities including manipulatives, games, and technology
- Sets ambitious benchmarks for students

*You can read more about **Everyday Mathematics** in the other attachment.*



## **Everyday Mathematics Implementation**

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### **Previous SJCS Experience with Everyday Mathematics**

Prior to the upcoming school-wide adoption, several General Studies teachers have used this program either as the main component of their math instruction or as a supplement to it. In both the primary and intermediate grades, teachers have been enthusiastic about the higher-level and conceptual thinking this program supports. They also note that the program engages students and motivates them to utilize skills and concepts.

### **Professional Development**

General Studies lead teachers will participate in training and professional development in order to successfully implement Everyday Mathematics in their classrooms. This will include summer intensives, including a workshop that some faculty will attend at University Child Development School. There will be in-service Everyday Mathematics opportunities, and staff meetings will encourage evaluation, reflection, and sharing of best practices among SJCS staff.

### **Everyday Mathematics in the 2011-12 Classroom**

This spring and summer, the faculty is prioritizing purchase of materials and technology recommended for full implementation of this curriculum. You should expect to see Everyday Mathematics materials and technology support phased in over the next 2-3 years. You will also continue to see a variety of supplemental pieces that emphasize the computational fluency students need to succeed in middle and high school math. Everyday Mathematics is a "distributive practice" curriculum in which students revisit concepts in the course of a single year and over multiple years. With a school-wide approach, students are assured the maximum benefit of the distributive practice system that both deepens their understanding and assures continuity and consistency.

### **Evaluation and Standardization**

The Head of School and faculty will evaluate and reflect upon the curriculum at each grade level and for the school as a whole. The Head will observe in all classrooms. Additionally, we will strive to allow faculty time to observe each other's teaching so that we can create internal best practices for this curriculum as it works for our student-body. We will solicit parent feedback, both informally and via survey(s). And, we will continue to augment classroom-based assessments with nationally-normed assessments and standardized testing. Our faculty's commitment to learning, implementation of new ideas, and revision/growth are central to our mission of lifelong learning and exemplary of a commitment to model this behavior for students.

## Math Philosophy Statement

May 2011

Our mathematics program focuses on the twin pillars of conceptual understanding and procedural fluency. We emphasize in-depth, integrated thinking and real-world connections for the student. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' strands of math are addressed at each grade level. The strands are: numbers and operations, measurement, algebra, geometry, data analysis, and probability. We also utilize the five process standards in our formal and informal mathematical instruction: problem solving; reasoning and proof; communication; connection; and representation.

To ensure comprehension, we introduce new concepts through *concrete tasks*. Then, we guide students in *understanding representational pictures*. Finally, we introduce the *corresponding mathematical language and abstract symbols*. Consider volume as an example. Students begin by using blocks to show volume. Then they work with a 3-D picture to consider volume. Finally, they progress to the algorithm  $V=LxWxD$ .

Our students learn the "Language of Math" which means they will have the ability to:

- Understand and use correct mathematical terminology
- Read mathematical sentences and problems with comprehension
- Express mathematical thoughts clearly using mathematical expressions, visual representations, and words
- Reason logically
- Recognize and employ common patterns of mathematical thought

Our approach emphasizes mathematical thinking and mental manipulation of numbers as complements to representative models of mathematics. We utilize auditory, visual, and kinesthetic practices to develop comprehension and actively engage students in the learning process.

We strive to ignite a passion for mathematics through instruction and tasks that elicit, engage, and challenge each student. In all subject areas, SJCS strives for differentiated curricula, meaning that each student is taught from *his/her* individual level and that growth is measured from that starting point. Students are given extra support if they are not yet at grade level. Likewise, there are opportunities for extension into higher grade-level concepts when a student is ready to progress above grade-level standards.

Mathematics is integrated throughout the day into other subject areas, especially science, art, and music. Like other subjects at SJCS, mathematics is taught in a variety of configurations. These include whole class, small group, partner, and individual work, as well as cross-grade-level blending.