



A Message From Our Principal

Mrs. Devorah Katz

The school year has been running very well. As you may be aware there have been further investments in the school with upgrades in technology, classroom equipment, and music appreciation for the lower division. The new additions have enabled our staff to further emphasize the individual students' curriculum. More importantly, of course, is the addition of highly professional teachers and therapists. We have added new 1st and 7/8th grade teachers, and therapists-giving each student greater access to the vital therapies they require. Tefillah is taught by Rabbi Jamal. The students look forward to his weekly visits. His exuberance is contagious as he teaches them Shabbat and holiday pizmonim and songs.

We are honored to introduce Dr. Chaim Neuhoff, PhD. as one of our newest staff members that have joined us this year. In addition to working with us in Gesher Yehuda, Dr. Neuhoff has his own prominent private practice in our community: he specializes in Behavioral Therapy and professional development. In the few short months since the beginning of school, Dr. Neuhoff's presence and talents have already made a mark, his professional demeanor and guidance have already been an inspiration and are valued by our staff, students and parents.

Behavior Management

Interview with Dr. Chaim Neuhoff, PhD.
Clinical Psychologist

What is the school's philosophy in regards to mental health?

Gesher Yehuda is geared to working with children with academic or learning challenges, with the goal of helping them reach their maximum learning potential. To fulfill this mission, there needs to be a ripe environment- one that allows the students to thrive without behavioral and emotional challenges interfering.

How do you address behavior issues?

At Gesher we utilize an overall system referred to as Classroom Positive Behavioral Supports. This system emphasizes schoolwide systems that include proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors to create positive

school environments. Attention is focused on creating and sustaining Tier 1 supports (targeting the entire school), Tier 2 supports (targeting specific groups of students), and Tier 3 (individual) supports that improve results from all students by making targeted behaviors less effective and relevant, and desired behavior more functional. In other words, we employ a school-wide program that highlight good behavior and character building. We also run several groups, including social skills and anger management groups, which help specific students function better. Finally, we create individual behavioral plans and provide counseling to specific students based on their unique needs.

How does this translate in a practical way to address the issues that the students might be facing?

As mentioned, challenges are targeted on both a macro school-wide level and a micro individualized level. On the macro-level, we create an environment of warmth, nurturance and positivity that creates a fertile ground for learning.

The class-wide behavioral system (which is tailored to the unique qualities of each class) supports effort and self-control throughout the school day. If a class needs encouragement in a specific area, we target that area for improvement. For example, if a class has issues with social dynamics such as bullying or disrespect, we use several methods to teach and reinforce social skills and empathy, including discussion, video clips, posting stories on a wall, and offering a classwide incentive.

On the micro-level, we're constantly observing, obtaining feedback from staff and parents, and assessing what each child's particular needs are and then we address them. Examples of specific issues that we have recently addressed in the school include students with challenges in impulse control and respecting other's possessions. At times, our observations indicate that there may be an undetected disability which need to be addressed for that particular student. In all of these situations, we always collaborate with parents throughout the process.

Can you tell us about some of the reward and punishment systems you have in place?

We have clearly defined rules to help the students know expectations. This is followed up with our school-wide system. To reinforce good behavior we might use incentives including

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praise, prizes, and various opportunities to engage in fun activities.

Our consequence system is utilized when students repeatedly violate classroom rules. This results in a "workout", where the student has to leave the classroom and perform a series of physical (such as jumping jacks), cognitive, and writing tasks. It's effective because it focuses the brain on these tasks and allows the student regulate themselves and resume classroom activities. Before returning to class the student must answer several questions: What did I do to deserve this workout? What will I do so it doesn't happen again? What is something special about myself? The objective is not to punish them, but to prepare them to return to class with a healthy mindset.

Any final thought?

In the few months that I am at Gesher, I am glad to have the opportunity to work with a wonderful coordinated staff. Together we continue to utilize and improve on our efficient system and the happy faces of the students and their eagerness to attend school is a testament to the hard work of the staff.

After completing his Psychology internship at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, Dr. Neuhoﬀ served as Clinical Instructor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at NYU School of Medicine from 2007–2012, and joined the faculty of Ferkauf Graduate School in 2014 where he supervises advanced doctoral students. Dr. Neuhoﬀ also runs many groups both for children and parents addressing the aforementioned challenges of children within a behavioral framework. He has consulted to both mainstream and special educational schools where he assessed for emotional and behavioral challenges and trained staff who work with these children.

Teacher Corner

We are proud to welcome Mrs. Shapiro who joined our esteemed Gesher Yehuda staff this year as the new first grade teacher, bringing her 20 years of expertise in the field of education. She is helping the students sharpen their letter recognition and reading skills using learning centers. The centers apply different modalities and multisensory exercises, in line with Gesher's teaching philosophy. They are a mix of auditory, visual, kinetic and tactile activities using computers and an engaging array of materials such as pipe cleaners, Clics, drawing tools, popsicle sticks... The students learn to identify, form and sound out each letter using a variety of techniques.

Around the School

- Gesher has a new OT Room and full-time Occupational Therapists and Speech Therapists on staff.
- The students worked very hard on their menorah projects for the Chanukah Menorah Competition!
- The students collected toys for the annual Chanukah Chai Lifeline Toy Drive.
- Mrs. Heltzer's 6th-8th grade girls completed their name reports. They researched the origins of their names, who they're named after, and then presented their reports to their classmates.
- Mrs. Myers's class adopted a new pet hamster.
- Mr. Schwartz's class reenacted the Civil War.
- After learning about Veteran's Day, the students wrote letters to soldiers.
- Mrs. Steinmetz's 3rd graders are hard at work earning their wood working projects.
- Every Rosh Chodesh the 7/8th graders exercise their business skills by running a canteen for the school.

