



## A Message from Our Principal

Mrs. Deborah Katz

Our school year has begun with a vibrant energy felt by all. With the building and classroom expansion, we have literally doubled in space. We now have our art and music studio, speech therapy center, computer lab and multi-sensory gym all in specially designated rooms and fully equipped with the latest treatment tools and technology. The classrooms themselves are also three times their size. Our planned shul is another added space for daily minyan, continuing to be led by Rabbi Leon Mansour. Special Tefillah with Rabbi Shlomo Elnadav is a much anticipated highlight in our students' week, learning the Shabbat and holiday pizmonim.

Our 8th grade graduation trip to Orlando was a major success. All of the students attended. It was incredible to see the transformation that occurred. Before the trip, only two students wanted to speak at the graduation, but afterwards- with a renewed confidence- they all either spoke or presented. It was a very proud occasion for everyone.

Our behavioral 3Cs program, which works on motivation for students using rewards, prizes and a grand trip was extremely successful last year, and we are looking forward to seeing it in action again this year.

## A Message from the Executive Director

Dr. Eugene Miller

Dear Parents,

Welcome back from what I trust was a wonderful summer. We have begun a new cycle and have again read Bereishit. It is a new school year and there is much to share as we apply cutting-edge technologies to provide a state-of-the-art education to our children. Let me offer a brief summary.

- We have expanded and now have 7 additional large, sun-filled classrooms for our students.
- We have instituted a new Occupational Therapy program called NeuroNet. NeuroNet is a research-based learning readiness program designed to help students develop fluency and automaticity in essential math, reading and handwriting skills. For a more detailed description, I invite you to read the article by our OT, Mrs. Rivky Teitelbaum, MS, OTR/L, featured in this newsletter.
- We have instituted a newly designed, hi-tech program that will enable all our teachers to carefully monitor classroom behavior to best encourage a positive, pro-learning attitude within each child.



I invite you to read the interview with our Child Psychologist, Dr. Chaim Neuhoff, PhD, featured in this newsletter as well.

- We have upgraded our IT infrastructure. All of our classrooms have Smart Boards and Wi-Fi-service.
- We have received a \$135,000 grant from the Department of Homeland Security to enhance our already high-level of security and better protect the children and staff entrusted in our care.

All of this is in addition to the quality, individualized attention our educational staff provides our children under the strong leadership of our Principal, Mrs. Deborah Katz.

Again, I welcome you to a new school year and wish each and every one of you hatzlacha rabba in 5779. Much more is to come, which I look forward to sharing in my next message.



## New Innovative System at Gesher Yehuda

Interview with Dr. Chaim Neuhoff, PhD

School Psychologist

### 1) Can you briefly describe GY's behavior system?

Yes. First, aside from focusing on behavior, it addresses the social and emotional needs of the students.

We target these domains on 3 different levels of intervention: school-wide, class-wide and individual. We have school-wide programs such as our 3Cs behavior system (Compliance, Completing My Work, Courteous Speech). And then, on an as-needed basis, we target specific classes for various projects, such as an individualized social skills program for a class that may benefit from it. And finally, we will work with individual students based on their own needs. For this we have a staff of mental health and other professionals working with our students on various areas.

**Rabbinic Advisor**  
Rabbi Eli Mansour

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**School Director**  
Mrs. Deborah Katz

**School Psychologist**  
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on various areas.

### **2) And then on top of that, there are rumors about a new computerized behavior tracking system, can you tell us about that?**

Yes. This is actually a very innovative school-wide computer based tracking system. As far as I know, we are the first school in the community to implement this. This program is called ClasStars, which was developed by my colleague Moshe Fried, LCSW who we invited to Gesher Yehuda to train our staff and oversee this program. It tracks behavior in real time. Every classroom teacher and assistant is provided with their own tablet which contains this program, which allows the instantaneous recording of various behaviors, via a simple swipe. For example, when a student enters the class, they are marked as present, allowing us to easily track attendance patterns including lateness and absence. In addition, we swipe for various target behaviors, including episodes of positive feedback as well as disruptions, and noncompliance. All of these behaviors automatically enter into our system.

### **3) How specifically will this enhance the well-being of the students at GY?**

This will happen in several ways and I will illustrate one now. Positive feedback will increase, which has been shown to be instrumental for a child's positive self-esteem. Research shows that the students who need positive feedback and support the most end up receiving it the least because of their challenges in behavioral areas. With this program, when the teacher swipe for positive comments the positive-negative ratio of all verbal feedback is displayed. This ensures that our students will be serviced better because the teacher and administrators can see the positive activities presented by the student and provide suitable encouragement.

### **4) Any other benefits to this new ClasStars system?**

Yes. Here we have collected hard data for parents and other professionals. We are able to see if what we are doing is working. We can follow and track detailed behavior over time. So, for example, if episodes of defiance in the classroom are going up from 2 episodes a day to 4 episodes a day over a month's time, we need to figure out why. Or, another example: If we are implementing a new program, we can show tangible improvement in various ways by noting decreases in specific negative behaviors in the classroom. This also allows for coordination among staff as we all have access to the same data and can easily retrieve it.

## **Teacher Corner**

We are proud to welcome Mrs. Sherri Harari to our Gesher Yehuda staff this year. She is trained in both Wilson and Orton-Gillingham. She brings with her excellent skills and experience in teaching reading to special needs students. She is a real asset to our school. Rivky Susskind is a new speech therapist at Gesher Yehuda with years of experience behind her. She is very knowledgeable in all areas of speech and language development. Her warm and friendly personality will definitely be recognized and appreciated by all staff and students.

## **Therapist Update**

### **Mrs. Rivky Teitelbaum, MS, OTR/L**

#### **Introducing NeuroNet: Increasing the Fluency and Automaticity of Math, Reading and Writing Skills**

The OT department is excited to introduce the NeuroNet program to Gesher Yehuda for the 2018-2019 school year. NeuroNet is a research-based learning readiness program designed to help students develop fluency in critical math, reading and handwriting skills. The NeuroNet exercises utilize rhythmic movement patterns in order to increase the fluency and automaticity of basic math, reading and writing skills. Once those basic skills are automated, the brain can exert more executive control on higher levels of learning, such as reading comprehension.

In addition to the students' individual therapy session, each class at Gesher Yehuda will receive a 30 minute OT group session on a daily basis to implement the NeuroNet exercises in conjunction with a series of other therapeutic exercises uniquely designed to promote reflex integration and provide proprioceptive sensory input. The goal of these exercises is two-fold. Research has shown that it can have immediate impact in helping to improve the students' ability to focus in class. Additionally, it can have a permanent, long-lasting impact by creating and strengthening the neural pathways necessary to facilitate access to higher levels of learning, thereby enabling our children to develop to their maximal potential.

