KOHELET PRIZE APPLICATION

THE JEWISH ACADEMY OF SUFFOLK COUNTY

THE NEW AMERICAN ACADEMY MODEL

“INTERDISCIPLINARY INTEGRATION”

**AN OVERVIEW**

The New American Academy (TNAA), established by Dr. Shimon Waronker in 2010, is a transformative school model. It values meaningful, collaborative, supportive relationships as the core of every school. Those relationships are what helps the four TNAA schools attract, develop, and retain skilled and talented teachers, and those teachers are what help schools make significant, sustainable progress. The model is a bold departure from typical education reform models. It represents a fundamental shift in the way educators think about teaching and learning, one that takes into consideration the needs of both student and teacher to better develop the potential of any school from the inside out.

After opening its first public school 6 years ago with 142 students (P.S. 770), the TNAA network now has an additional public school (P.S.274), and a charter school, with a total of 1450 inner city students. In the fall of 2016, the TNAA curriculum and model was adapted by the Jewish Academy of Suffolk County, selected to be the first private school in the country to assume this innovative approach to education.

The Jewish Academy, now in its 13th year, was selected due to its supportive board, administration, and small, pliable size. It boasts two Master Teachers (trained in the TNAA system and voted by their peers to be Master Teachers) who are leading the faculty in applying best practices, which are embedded into the TNAA school day.

This is not the format for explaining all of the unique standards of this model (visit TNAACS.org/about), but these standards are more than points of discussion in a teacher’s manual, or even the subject of intense professional development during the course of the academic year. They are reviewed on a daily basis during a 90 minute team meeting which is attended by all faculty - to review daily practices and ensure that each child is getting the best education the TNAA system can possibly offer. Peer review is not a monthly or weekly activity – it is a daily rigorous activity.

**Our Faculty**

Research has shown that a quality teacher is the greatest single determinant of student academic success. We have a career ladder that provides a continuum for teacher growth that is both supported and incentivized. The four-step career ladder (apprentice, associate, partner, master) is based on demonstrated ability, culminating with the Master Teacher position. This type of team allows for transparency, positive peer-pressure, multiple perspectives, support, and a diverse range of skill sets. It also affords us the ability to gain knowledge from others with varying experiences, educational strategies, and perspectives on our students’ knowledge and understanding.

In addition to our daily team meetings developing and reflecting on curriculum and student engagement, each week (throughout the year) we meet as a team to reflect on team dynamics, personal struggles with work or home, or system wide challenges. Every five to six weeks we also meet with a reflective coach to review our recent round of reflection for trends that may need to be discussed and reflected on further. This process all begins during five weeks of the summer, as our team meets to create our curriculum map. In addition, during the summer we are trained in Harvard University for a week of professional development on in-depth communication, reflection, and listening skills. Critical for any team-based environment, these skills enable our teacher-teams to maximize their collective potential and to avoid the interpersonal pitfalls and misunderstandings that often hamper collaborative efforts. The value and intention is that a teacher who feels supported and cared for is more likely to be effective, in turn benefitting the students in the process.

**Integrated Learning**

*Integrated learning* is fundamental to the TNAA philosophy. As a Jewish school, our belief is that Jewish concepts should drive the curriculum for the entire school and be integrated into every subject. As such, the academic year is divided into five units, based mostly on the Jewish calendar cycle. These themes influence both Limudei Chol and Limudei Kodesh – secular and Judaic studies. This year our units of study are:

1. reflection – based on the High Holidays
2. light over darkness – based on Chanukah
3. more than the eye can see – based on Purim
4. from slavery to freedom – based on Pesach
5. H.E.A.R.T.S. – Humility, Empowerment, Aspiration, Responsibility, Teamwork and Scholarship – based on our ongoing Middot/character development program

The daily “team meetings” provide an opportunity for ongoing development of each theme, interaction of all faculty to compare notes and fine tune their curriculum to ensure they keep to the theme, and ongoing reappraisal of how to better integrate subjects for the betterment of the learning environment.

Each theme unit is concluded by a Curriculum Celebration, which highlights the student accomplishments and displays the integrated learning which took place. We completed our first unit of study with our Curriculum Celebration on November 10, 2016. The attached material represents the work of the students and the faculty in integrating “reflection” into every subject, under the guidance of our two Master Teachers and with the active participation of our faculty, all under the direct advisement of and Chaya Teldon, the Head of School.

*We trust that this material, together with the following explanation, will clearly show how this integration is translated into the daily life of our students.*

What you see here can be used in Jewish Day Schools of all sizes. The results of our work can be of great use to others in taking the necessary steps to adapt an integrated learning curriculum in their institutions. Dr. Waronker’s plan is that The Jewish Academy will become the showcase for Jewish Day Schools around the world to show what a cutting edge day school education can offer.