

Passion Learning

The Sandra E. Lerner Jewish Community Day School

Durham, North Carolina

Submitted by Allison B. Oakes on behalf of The Passion Learning Team

Malcolm Gladwell touts the 10,000 hour rule . Gladwell's assertion is that it takes 10,000 hours for an individual to become an expert in a discipline. Providing opportunities for our students to exercise their passions today gives them opportunities to build towards those 10,000 hours. Thus, we are preparing them, not only for the real world, but also for a future in which they create a niche for themselves over many years, starting in elementary school by doing things they love and connecting with other kids that share similar passions. Together, they collaborate, communicate, critically think through challenges, and come up with creative solutions: the skills necessary to be successful in the real world awaiting them.

The Lerner Jewish Community Day School is now in its second year of offering Passion Learning opportunities to students in Kindergarten through fifth grade. Each week, students attend self-selected elective classes facilitated by Lerner's own faculty, staff and volunteer parents, who share their own passions with the students. As a small institution, Lerner's class sizes are small, but through passion learning, students connect with kids across all grades in the elementary school who they discover love the same things they do. The courses offered are multi-age, Kindergarten through 5th grade, classes that provide opportunities for connection, fellowship, and leadership.

Now in its second year, Lerner has offered to its elementary students:

Technology: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engineering• Computer Programming• Robotics	Fine Arts: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fiber Arts• Water Color• Observational Drawing• Photography	Strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Board Games• Chess
Culinary Arts: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jewish Cooking• Cake Decorating	Sports: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yoga• Soccer• Basketball• Outdoor Sports & Games	Additional: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• American Sign Language• Tikkun Olam – Social Action• Gardening• Drama



1935 W. Cornwallis Road
Durham, NC 27705
919.286.5517
919.286.5035 fx
www.lernerschool.org

Students anxiously await Fridays. They count the minutes until their elective class. They literally run through the hallways (even with educators shouting, “please walk”!) to get to their classes. They hang-out with their new electives friends during recess and lunch. They share their excitement with their parents, who have consistently exclaimed about what a fantastic addition to the school these electives have been. On admissions tours, prospective families are impressed that children have this experience offered to them when other elementary schools do not. Most importantly, we watch five through ten year olds break down barriers between school and the real world, giving us adults an opportunity to glimpse the future of our students and children.

Even with all of the excitement and success, the Passion Learning program has not been without its challenges. The greatest hurdle is that it will take a couple of years to overcome the loss of time Lerner’s faculty and staff feel they are experiencing: time away from their students and time away from planning. Passion Learning is now a permanent program in the school week and the administration is supporting the teachers in understanding that this change has impacted the way things used to be.

To a lesser degree, some of the challenges navigated include:

- The large amount of time needed during the summer to schedule the electives per trimester and slot students into each so that they receive at least one of their top choices, preferably two or more;
- Encouragement of parents to allow their child to choose their electives themselves;
- Determination of the balance between gender and age;
- Budget from operational costs for supplies or subscriptions.

Of the list above, the greatest challenge is the cost of supplies and from where to budget those items. For the first two years of the program, we have used a small restricted gift donated to the school to provide education enrichment to students at Lerner. This program has become so popular and desirable; a future funding option would be to ask the community to fund a restricted account for Passion Learning.

Jewish children that attend Jewish day schools are generally coming from families where education is a priority. These children will learn to read, write, and do arithmetic at whichever school their parents choose to send them. Jewish day schools already set themselves apart from the variety of school choice options available by offering Hebrew, Judaic, and Israel studies. Offering another opportunity to set itself apart, such as Passion Learning, allows children to tap into the real world around them and prepare themselves for the unknown world ahead.



1935 W. Cornwallis Road
Durham, NC 27705
919.286.5517
919.286.5035 fx
www.lernerschool.org

The Sandra E. Lerner Jewish Community Day School Replicable Procedure for Passion Learning
(calendar below based upon school starting late August and ending first week of June)

Spring (March-April)	<p>Prior to Year One:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask faculty and staff to offer a 12-week class based upon their own hobbies, skills, or talents • Target known parents who have hobbies, skills, or talents to volunteer to teach a 12-week class (a teacher will be assigned to them); for example, a parent that is a great cook, ask him/her to do a Jewish cooking class* <p>Year Two:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty and staff offer same class, similar class, or a brand new class • Send a request out to all parents about volunteering for a 12-week elective (determine which day and time it will be offered the following year so that parents can make an informed decision)*
Late Spring (May)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a google-form to select the electives per child • Create an e-flyer of the elective offerings, description, teacher, link to google-form and schedule it to go live with families knowing when it will go live. The google-form timestamps each entry so that students can be put into each elective on a first come, first served basis • Each child chooses up to five electives in priority order
Early Summer (June)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on size of school, set a significant amount of time aside to plot students by their first, second, and third choices into a spreadsheet listing all of the electives (Lerner is on trimesters and the goal is to have the top three choices be selected) • Determine which electives will be offered in each trimester • Shift kids around utilizing their 4th and 5th choices when their top choices are given in the same trimester
First Week of School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share with students and families their Passion Learning schedule for the year

* At Lerner, parents lead Jewish Cooking, Chess, and Drama. Some parents opted to volunteer to help with an elective and not to actually lead it.

Footnote:

1. Gladwell, Malcolm. Outliers: The Story of Success. 1st ed. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008.



1935 W. Cornwallis Road
Durham, NC 27705
919.286.5517
919.286.5035 fx
www.lernerschool.org