

Scheduling Circus

The Main Event

At our school, each teacher is tasked with figuring out a schedule that best suits their classroom. This task may sound like a simple spreadsheet with timeslots and subjects to some, but our school stands on the firm belief that “every student should get what they need”. On top of that belief and the dual curriculum that comes with being a Jewish day school, we also implement Montessori practices, and have multi-age, multi-level classrooms. Then you throw in the vital components of social-emotional health, differentiation, and inclusion, along with brain breaks, park time and related arts, and you see where the juggling act comes into play. Unfortunately for this act, there was no dress rehearsal, it was put to the test as soon as the students joined the show. Sit tight and enjoy the show!

Active Participants

- 14 girls, ages 9–12 (who have all come from traditional schools with set grade level classes)
- 1 full-time General Studies teacher / novice scheduler
- 1 full-time Jewish Studies teacher
- 1 part-time Jewish Studies teacher
- 1 Director / Principal

A Word from the Sponsor- Mrs. Dina Kranz

The children at Arevim Schoolhouse are offered a customized curriculum in a Montessori inspired environment that will allow them to achieve their full potential while building a sense of community. We truly believe that every student should get what they need. Our goal is to produce students who will be critical thinkers, effective communicators, productive individuals, problem solvers and independent achievers. Our intention is to teach each child with warmth, love, care and excitement, in a stress-free, positive atmosphere that promotes respectable Jewish morals and values. While learning in a peer level group, each child explores his or her natural curiosity by being encouraged to ask questions and experiment within a structure.

In addition to the academic curriculum, Arevim Schoolhouse offers experiential classes, technology programs, PBL, safe access to online sources, sports, and many more extra-curricular activities. Our innovative approach combines Montessori methods with Chassidic teachings and values, while adhering to the highest standards of excellence in education of secular and Judaic studies. We believe this school model is the best way for our children to learn, to love learning, to embrace their Judaism, to be proud of their identity, to be respected and respectful, to learn to the fullest of their own abilities and hence, be socially, emotionally and academically successful.

We focus on teaching kids *how* to think - not what to think, all in a loving and non-judgmental environment.

Opening Night

Our first schedule was designed and put in place after the first two weeks of school. This gave us the chance to actually meet the girls and get a general feel for their beginning academic levels before grouping them. Keep in mind our classroom includes multi-age and multi-level students, girls ranging from 9–12 years old who would traditionally be separated in 4th, 5th and 6th grade classrooms. Our first schedule took into account each student's age, but relied more heavily on diagnostic screenings to group students in academically and developmentally appropriate groups (or so we thought). Students were organized into groups of four to five girls for lessons. We found that students who were grouped together for one subject, wouldn't necessarily work best being grouped together for another subject. This led to many different groups and many different schedules. Each student had multiple group names on their schedule and would be called for certain lessons based on one of the names (i.e. color) and for other lessons using another name. I am confident that during this time if an individual were to come into our classroom and blurt out a random color or landform, they would soon have a group of students in front of them while others quickly went to check their schedule to see if that name applied to them in any way.

Did this schedule work?

Yes. There were time slots. There were subjects. There were groups of students.

Was every student truly getting what *they needed*? No.

Blue Sea Schedule		
Time	Subject	Teacher
8:30-9:15	Davening	Morah Betty
9:15-9:45	Language Arts	Morah Amy
9:45-10:15	Chumash	Morah Betty
10:15-10:55	Independent Work	Morah Amy
10:55-11:00	Prepare for Park	
11:00-11:30	Choice at Park	
11:30-11:40	Independent Reading	
11:40-12:15	Science/Social Studies (T/Th) Independent Work (M/W)	Morah Amy
12:15-12:45	Lunch	
12:45-1:30	Navi/Halacha/Yahadut	Morah Betty
1:30-2:00	Math	Morah Amy
2:00-2:30	Independent Work	
2:30-2:45	Brain Break / Snack	
2:45-3:20	Ivrit (M/W/Th) Independent Work (T)	Morah Betty
3:20-3:30	Classroom Job	
3:30-4:15	Specials	

At this point, we had been together in the classroom for about a month. We were learning more about each other and recognizing different academic needs. Through reflection and feedback, we realized that a couple of students needed to be grouped differently in order to better serve their needs. The curtain was closing on this go around, Sukkot break was approaching and changes needed to be made before the next performance.

An example of a student's schedule during the multiple names / multiple groups phase.

The Encore

(that lead to *a lot* more)

It was back to the drawing board. Time slots. Subjects. Students. Groups.

After hours and hours of arranging, rearranging, grouping, (crying), regrouping, shifting, etc. the *perfect schedule* was made. Groups were smaller. Students were going to be pulled for lessons with only one or two peers. Lesson groups were based mostly on academic compatibleness. Everyone had designated times for each lesson, as well as independent work time, without a cluster of group names on their page. Morah Amy finally felt like that smooth juggling rhythm she was searching for in the perfect schedule had arrived. It was a scheduling miracle, and it was time to perform.

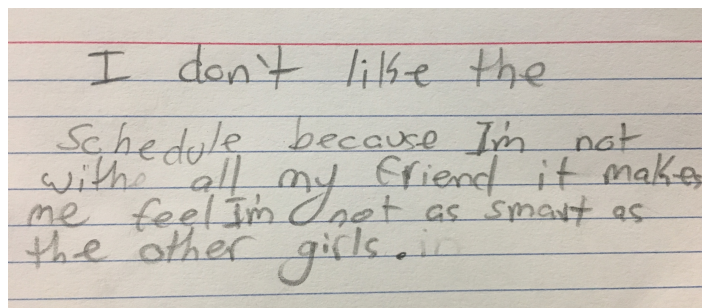
Schedule (Monday-Thursday)		
Time	Subject	Teacher
8:30-9:15	Tefilah	
9:15-10:05	Chumash Lesson and Work Time	Morah Raizy
10:05-11:00	Navi/Yehadut/Halacha Lesson and Work Time	Morah Raizy
11:00-11:30	Choice at Park	
11:30-12:00	Science / S.S.	Morah Amy
12:00-12:30	Lunch	
12:30-1:20	L.A. Lesson and Work Time	Morah Amy
1:20-2:20	Math	
2:20-2:50	I.W. (Monday = Math)	
2:50-3:20	Ivrit Lesson and Work Time	Morah Betty
3:20-3:30	Class Job / Pack Up	
3:30-4:15	Specials	

Sukkot break ended and the *new and improved* show began. The ‘perfectly’ revised schedules were presented, explained and examined on the day students arrived back to school.

Change of any kind generally generates some pushback, at least initially. There is always an adjustment phase, especially when it comes to classroom changes. I felt the initial frustration, that instinctual resistance to change, from the girls on the first day. At the end of the day I offered each student a notecard, and asked if they would reflect and provide feedback regarding their thoughts and feelings about the new schedule.

I have always enjoyed student feedback, for a multitude of reasons. I am a firm believer in allowing and encouraging students to (appropriately) exercise their voice. I strive to incorporate student suggestions, interests and opinions into my planning, lessons and overall classroom environment. After all, they are just as much of (if not more than) a stakeholder in this whole education process as I am.

One notecard. That is all it took, one notecard. The honest voice of one student. As I read this notecard I felt as though each word was literally leaping off of the page and hitting me directly in the heart.



During the process of “arranging, rearranging, grouping, (crying), regrouping, shifting, etc.” after the first show, in an effort to fit in, include and juggle all of the critical and necessary elements of a schedule, a ball was dropped. Not only dropped, but overlooked and pushed to the side. Maybe at the time this ball seemed to weigh a little less, possibly as something that could be added back to the mix later on.

One notecard. One voice.

The weight of this single ball had now been felt in a way that it will never be forgotten.

Once again, it was time to go back to the drawing board.

The (possibly grand) Finale

I believe that the appropriate phrase for this situation is “*the show must go on*”, and in our case, it has.

This time around tweaks and changes were made considering social and emotional health first and foremost, and academic levels second. We realized that some students need a more strictly structured schedule, while others can manage without. There was no “one size fits all” solution or quick fix. It took time and lots of thought. There were still some boxes. There were times and subjects. Most importantly there were faces. Faces and feelings of students. Not numbers or group names, but careful consideration for each human as a whole and their personal needs as learners.

Below you will find an example of one of the schedules that works for several of our students today, followed by student feedback. I will allow their words to serve as a testament to what is (currently) considered *our grand finale*.

Schedule (Monday-Thursday)	
Time	Subject
8:30-9:15	Tefilah
9:15-11:00	Block 1 - Work Time <i>(Independently work until called for a lesson)</i> L.A. Lesson S.S. / Science Lesson Chumash
11:00-11:30	Choice at Park
11:30-12:00	Independent Reading and Working
12:00-12:30	Lunch
12:30- 3:20	Block 2- Work Time <i>(Independently work until called for a lesson)</i> Ivrit Lesson Math
3:20-3:30	Class Job / Pack Up
3:30-4:15	Specials

Reviews

Our schedule has really been a journey for us. We have been through three schedules but we have only been in school for four months! Besides all that we have a Montessori style school, so our schedule is a little different than a regular school's schedule. Finally, after that long journey, we have a good schedule, that gives us a lot of flexibility and independent time. This allows us to balance our group and independent learning time. What I like about our independent time is that we can learn without the pressure of being in a group. What I like about our group learning time is that we can

learn from our friends and our own mistakes. That is what I like about our schedule.

Our Schedule

This year, my schedule is different than any of my schedules in the past. I think the main reason for that is my new school, Arevim, because it's montessori style, unlike my old school.

At first, we were in set groups, with the same people for every class. I liked it, although I may have liked it less if I had considered other possible setups. It could have been a little more flexible, but I only think that now that I've experienced other setups. And it still made so much more sense and worked so much better for me than my old schedule at my old school.

After Hurricane Irma, my schedule was rearranged. Two girls from my old group now had a few separate classes than the rest of us. They were very upset about it, and so were some other girls,

because they wanted to be together. But I think they were overreacting. We were only with them about an hour less than we used to be, and I liked being in smaller groups so we could work even more on our own level.

Even so, so many girls were upset that the schedule was changed again. In my opinion, it was the best change yet, because it was so flexible. We weren't in set groups, and the time was split up well to allow us enough time for each subject. I loved it.

A week or two later, a few small changes were made to the schedule so that the chunks of time flowed better. It just made me like it even more!

Overall, I think I adjusted pretty well to each new change. I was happy to go with the flow.

Each time the schedule was changed, for me it felt like it was just getting better and better and opening up new possibilities. I like having specials every day and a half hour recess, so we get plenty of exercise and fresh air. I like (having) reading and independent work time, so I can calm down after recess and get some things done. I like how the groups for each class are arranged so that we work on the best level for us.

And I like finally having a schedule that is non-stressful, makes so much sense, and works so well for me!

This year we had a lot of schedule changes. We had around 5 different schedules. The schedule we have now I like the best. I like it the best because it is a good fit for me. In my old school we would do everything the same. But here we get individual time. This school is a lot more suitable for me and what I like. I like that in the morning I sometimes get one on one time with Morah Amy, and Morah Betty. I really enjoy my school and my schedule.

In the past my schedule was a little bit different, they stayed the same all the time, and no one had a say of how we can change it. But here in Arexium, we get to negotiate and agree upon something that everyone is happy with. There have been some ups and downs in this journey, but we survived the risks of having schedules that we were not happy with. I feel that our schedules are different because of the way we learn, we learn in a way where we are independent and learn to think out of the box, that is why we are flexible with this new schedule being pulled in and out of classes and learning differently.

I'm glad with this new schedule ~~and~~ it was hard but we got through with it and agreed.

We've tried many times, and twisted and turned some ideas on how we can make our schedule right for everyone. It's been a little scary being that we have a say and responsibility of changing our schedules. The first time it was ok with it, but felt we needed to change it, so we did. The second time was very scary being that everyone wasn't comfortable with it. It was risky, but we made the appropriate changes and were happy. Our teachers were there to support us and will continue helping us in our decisions.

There was one time in this year I disliked the Schedule. Why I didn't like it because me in my friend was in a group together but just us. I liked her but I felt left out with my friend and it's a small school so if you don't like the schedule then you won't like the school. I got really sad that I wasn't with my friends so I told my mom and this school is like if something is wrong they would help you. So the next day the schedule was fixed and everyone is happy. Now that everyone is together the first thing we do before we go to the park is Morah Raizy after we go to the park we have lunch then we have Morah Amy after that fun time with Morah Amy we got to Morah Betty then Math then we go back to Morah Amy finally after we are done we go home.

Closing Remarks

“He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life.”
— *Muhammad Ali*

Taking risks can be uncomfortable.

As a teacher, I believe that we often fear the thought of outcomes in the classroom that we cannot control nor predict. This very fear can easily become a root that anchors us in a pattern of “playing it safe.”

As educators, we encourage our students to take risks each and every day. To try. To explore. To trust. To wonder. To think outside of the box. To challenge limits. To push well beyond their comfort zones.

Our students are risk takers. We should be too.

- It was a risk starting the school year without an algorithmic schedule based off of time and student numbers.
- It was a risk trusting teachers to formulate their own personal schedules.
- It was a risk completely changing schedules, more than once, during the school year.
- It was a risk allowing students to use their voice and have a say so in their schedules.

These risks, among others, were all uncomfortable; many of them resulted in failures. But it is those very failures that have served as catalysts for growth. These risks were certainly worth their rewards.

I failed at correctly balancing and considering students’ social-emotional health when making a schedule. Now, it is on the forefront of my mind when making decisions in our classroom. I have learned that in order for my students to learn, they must first feel comfortable, valued, socially accepted and safe. From my failure, I have reconfirmed the inimitable value in student feedback. I have seen firsthand the rewards that come from allowing students to be large stakeholders and decision makers in the choices made about their educations. Above all, I can personally attest to power that risk-taking and failures can have in bringing a classroom together.

Could it be that *teachers who are not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish little in the classroom?* From my experiences, I can confidently say that risks and failures do not break the classroom, but instead can be the most necessary components of making a classroom.