

Leading by example

TANENBAUMCHAT'S PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS SHOWS THAT LEARNING IS A LIFELONG ENDEAVOUR

BY ERIN SILVER

TanenbaumCHAT values lifelong learning, and teachers are leading by example. The school offers a robust professional development program with a range of opportunities for teachers to hone their skills, stay up-to-date with the latest technology and continually educate themselves—and each other—with the most current information. All of this translates into a faculty that's very prepared for 21st-century learning and best able to inspire their students.

"We want teachers to see themselves as lifelong learners, continuing to broaden their own horizons and improve their teaching craft," says **Dr. Jonathan Levy**, Head of School.

The school's philosophy is that teachers who are inspired to learn themselves are going to continue to inspire students. With everything from pedagogy to technology constantly evolving, there are always new ideas, techniques and strategies that help teachers impact students in the most effective ways.

"Everyone in the school should be learning and we are always happy to find ways for our stellar staff to continue to grow," says Dr. Levy.

"Professional development at TanenbaumCHAT aligns with our current educational priorities and provides teachers with concrete knowledge, resources and tools to implement in their daily practice," says **Renee Cohen '96**, Principal at TanenbaumCHAT. "This happens throughout the year at conferences, workshops and courses that support the growth mindset that is part of our staff culture."

The school also regularly takes advantage of the resources available at numerous educational organizations. These include the North American





Avital Aharon

Jewish day school umbrella organization Prizmah, as well as The Lookstein Center for Jewish Education at Bar-Ilan University, BetterLessons, Unpacked for Educators, JNF Canada – Education, and the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto Israel Engagement programming.

Last year, the school placed a spotlight on two areas in particular: innovation in education with a focus on the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) as well as on adolescent mental health in a post-pandemic era.

Avital Aharon, TanenbaumCHAT's Director of Educational Technology, says the educational leadership spent a great deal of time discussing the emergence of AI tools, especially ChatGPT, which uses prompt engineering to compose everything from high-level essays to *bar mitzvah* speeches. "Plagiarism and acceptable use were a major concern, and teachers wanted to learn more and understand the tools and their use."



Dwayne Matthews

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Aharon searched for a high-level speaker to address the subject. "We brought in Dwayne Matthews, an innovation evangelist, a 'future of education' strategist and an expert on the topic," Aharon explains.



Dr. Alex Russell

"Everyone wanted to understand how TanenbaumCHAT was planning to embrace AI, talk about it, educate students about its dangers and limitations and how we, as educators, can use it to our benefit," explains Aharon. She says discussions weren't only about plagiarism and acceptable use, but how the school could uphold its educational objectives and ensure that students can safely and responsibly explore the realms of the digital world.

Thanks to these sessions, teachers started experimenting with the chatbot. Students in engineering class, for example, developed a coding activity that used ChatGPT to find errors. Other departments found ways to incorporate other tools, such as text to image AI platforms, into their teaching and assessments.

Adds Aharon, “It brought up a lot of conversations about values, including lessons from our Jewish traditions, and we developed an AI policy that the entire school abides by.”

Mental health issues also came to the forefront during the pandemic. “On the ground, we saw the impact of the pandemic on our students when they returned to in-person learning,” says Cohen, who brought in two well-known keynote speakers, Dr. Alex Russell and Dr. Jack Muskat, to talk about fostering positive adolescent mental health.

Teachers and social workers, guidance counsellors and student services staff had all reported seeing in students an increase in anxiety and fear of the unknown. Though supports were already in place, it was important to have information sessions for teachers as well. “We’re not asking teachers to be social workers or nurses,” says Cohen. “However, now they’re more equipped to help students make better sense of the new reality.

Cohen also enjoys when teachers share what they’re doing in their classes. “As part of PD, we always include a ‘sharing best practice’ component,” says Cohen. “We learn best when we learn from one another and with so much expertise and experience in our school, we use these moments to grow as educators,” says Cohen.

Sara Black has been at TanenbaumCHAT for 19 years and teaches Grade 12 English and Grade 11 Media. She gained a lot from the sessions on mental health and says that learning from professionals in the field was invaluable. “These sessions gave us more tools we could use to help our students,” says Black. “We aren’t only educators; we’re caregivers.”

But she also appreciates the “teachers teaching teachers” component. “This is helpful for curriculum development, learning different ways of managing students and



Sara Black



Tom Rimon

discovering new educational tools and online resources we can implement in the classroom,” she says. “It’s very effective when we can learn from each other, collaborate and brainstorm how we’re teaching the same subject within our departments.”

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Tom Rimon is now in his second year at the school, teaching Jewish history and Hebrew. In the last few years,



the Ivrit Department at TanenbaumCHAT implemented a new curriculum and all teachers were offered PD to learn it. "Last summer I was sent to Boston for a week of PD and last March most of the department went to Boston for another session," he explains, noting that the PD was developed by the Israel Ministry of Education and professionals from Israel were on hand to show participants how the program works.

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When it comes to Jewish history, the professional development opportunities were just as inspiring for Rimon. The Jewish History Department had the chance to work with the Ghetto Fighters House Museum in

Israel. "Students are living in a vibrant society that is constantly changing. We must be able to adapt our way of teaching to the reality they're living in," says Rimon. "Even in history, there are new discoveries every day and new things that are happening. As an educator, it's important to develop skills and knowledge and meet other teachers to see what they're doing. It makes me a better professional."

As the Dean for Grades 9 and 10 and Director of Student Services, **Heather Weinstock** helps plan the PD for the student services team. "Professional development is just part of who we are. In my 30 years of teaching I've never seen a group of educators soak up the words of a good speaker as I have at TanenbaumCHAT," says Weinstock. "Our administration recognizes that encouraging or facilitating opportunities for us to stay abreast of trends or allowing us to pursue our passions or develop our strengths is invaluable to the entire school community."

In the final analysis, "it's all to enhance teaching in the classroom," says Aharon. "It's really about making sure our students are successful, engaged, curious and ready for life beyond TanenbaumCHAT." ♦