

JNTP and Azrieli Partner to Offer Innovative Certificate for New day school teachers

New Partnership Combines Formal Pedagogical Training with Mentoring to Offer 9-Credit Certificate in Effective Teaching Strategies

The Jewish New Teacher Project (JNTP) and Yeshiva University's Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration have teamed up for a first-of-its-kind certificate in Effective Teaching Strategies. The certificate grants teachers nine graduate credits, thus formally recognizing the intensive learning they undergo as part of their being mentored over the course of their first year of teaching. The certificate provides these new teachers with their first immersive experience of professional training, after which they can continue with their preparation to earn Master's degrees, whether at Azrieli or elsewhere.

The idea for the certificate was born of an acknowledgement that new teachers are increasingly learning about their craft within their schools as they begin teaching rather than in pre-service programs, or in graduate programs taken concurrently while they begin to teach. Since 2003, the Jewish New Teacher Project has been the gold standard to train mentors in Jewish day schools to provide support for new teachers, improving their instruction and increasing their retention in the field. Veteran educators undergo an intensive 2-year training using a comprehensive, structured curriculum on how to effectively offer guided feedback and direction to new teachers. In their schools, mentors and teachers meet weekly or biweekly in classroom observations and detailed reflection to help the novice teacher grow as a professional. No other program offers such extensive, structured support for a new teacher in day schools.

Knowing this, Azrieli approached JNTP to see if a partnership could be worked out. It turned out that for years, JNTP had wanted to recognize the hundreds of hours novice teachers spend with their mentors, from pre-observation conversations to post-observation reflection and discussion. Working collaboratively, a three-course/9 credit certificate was designed, whereby the content of select Azrieli courses could be covered through a late-summer intensive Summer Institute combined with the weekly meetings between mentors and mentees.

"This is part of Azrieli's vision," said Rabbi Dr. Michael Berger, Azrieli's dean. "We realize that in today's environment, where day school teachers are often hired with little or no formal training,

the practical experience gained in the field is increasingly the novice teacher's own classroom. We are committed to finding creative ways to "marry" serious theoretical material with the hands-on practical experience teachers are gaining in their schools."

"This is a pilot," said Nina Bruder, JNTP's Chief Executive Officer. "Everything we do at JNTP goes through extensive, rigorous thinking and planning followed by careful execution and evaluation. We started small – 7 teachers working with seasoned mentors in 7 long-time partner day schools in NY/NJ. We are providing the highest quality program in a fairly controlled setting in order to learn what works best when combining an academic approach with job-embedded support."

The 2.5-day Summer Institute took place in late August at the Shefa School and explored cutting-edge pedagogical approaches and classroom strategies. The program focused on presenting evidence-based elements of effective teaching and learning, with particular emphasis on creating optimal learning environments for all students that foster engagement and academic success. The teachers learned about learner variability to accommodate diverse learning needs, and strategic lesson planning that begins with big ideas while incorporating SMART yet flexible goals. The institute also addressed critical assessment strategies, covering both formative and summative approaches to guide effective instruction, alongside exploring what safety truly means in educational contexts and how to build meaningful relationships with students. At the conclusion, these teachers joined other new teachers who will be mentored this year through JNTP's core Teacher Induction program. This, too, will be part of the pilot: comparatively evaluating the two sets of novice teachers to see whether the learning in the certificate program is additive in terms of teachers' preparation and pedagogic skills.

Bruder concluded, "We're excited to be partnering with a graduate school like Azrieli to develop an approach that is a win-win-win: a win for the teachers who earn graduate credit and are better prepared to start their new jobs, a win for Azrieli who work with more students, and a win for JNTP whose mission is to ensure the effectiveness and retention of Jewish day school teachers when they start out." This is strong collaboration.