

Congregational School Initiative

The Congregational School Initiative (CSI) is a professional development program for teachers. CJL provides classes throughout the year for teachers from all Jewish schools in greater Milwaukee. Participating supplementary school teachers can earn stipends for participation.

The CSI theme for the 2017-18 school year will be "Deeper Learning about the Jewish Holidays." CSI will be introducing a teacher mentoring program and a class for new teachers who want to learn classroom skills or enhance their Judaic knowledge. For more information about CSI, contact [Tzipi Altman-Shafer, TziporahA@MilwaukeeJewish.org](mailto:Tzipi.Altman-Shafer@MilwaukeeJewish.org).



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by Marilyn Franklin,
Congregation Shalom

I have taught second grade religious school at Congregation Shalom for the past 40+ years. In that time I've taken advantage of many in-service and professional growth workshops. These opportunities were definitely beneficial. I "took away" much relevant subject information and learned a variety of great creative teaching strategies.

However, nothing in the past can compare to the ongoing project based learning (PBL) initiative now being emphasized by CJL. As a long time Nicolet High School Board member, I have been well aware of PBL in the public schools. It seemed only natural that this approach would soon be emphasized in the religious school setting as well.

The underlying belief of PBL is that if students acquire information for themselves and if they are interested in what they are learning, the learning will be much deeper. It is then the role of the teacher to act as a facilitator for students as they work together and share ideas in small groups. This helps them develop problem-solving and creative thinking skills that are essential not only in a school setting but also later on in the real world of adult employment.

CJL has made possible many learning sessions for teachers this past year. I've become increasingly aware of the long-range important benefits of PBL. Now, when planning a lesson, I always ask

myself how can I better create a classroom experience that both imparts knowledge but also encourages students to develop higher level thinking skills. Needless to say, my efforts to master PBL continue to be a work in progress, but I am committed to the prevailing philosophy that a teacher need not be the "sage on the stage" but rather the "guide on the side."

What does CSI mean to me?

by Diane Boland, Congregation Beth Israel Ner Tamid School of Jewish Studies

I have been a religious school educator for over twenty years and have participated in a variety of educational opportunities including synagogue sessions, traveling to Israel and studying at Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, and most importantly participating in CSI classes. I remember learning as a Jewish Educator when we still had MAJE (predecessor of CJL). I believe in CSI for several reasons. Most importantly, it affords Jewish educators the opportunity to learn from peers, other community members, and outside the Jewish and secular areas. The program has transformed over the years from learning a few topics to now having a multitude of options. Imagine going from choosing a few television stations to switching to cable television. That is how CSI has changed over the years. The program has afforded me the opportunity to learn from speakers from around the



world, synagogue colleagues, hands-on workshops, chavruta (small group study), learning about technology, classroom management, etc.

CSI has influenced my teaching in so many ways. I know as a religious school teacher that I have resources through CSI - whether it's staff support, religious school colleagues, the MJF/CJL website, and most importantly the CSI classes. The classes have pushed me to think outside of the box. I consider myself a hands-on educator but being exposed to project based learning through CSI, I have come to the conclusion that a Jewish educator must follow the pathway of his/her yeladim. L'Dor V'Dor ("from generation to generation"), what a Jewish educator

should remember when planning and executing his/her lessons. What impact do I want to leave on my students?

Connecting with Other Educators

by Jill Voras, Milwaukee Jewish Day School

The CJL classes that I have attended (Love and Logic and Storytelling Using Apps) has helped me so much in my kindergarten classroom.

Love and Logic has helped me to maintain a calm and natural environment with my students. It taught me to respond to my students rather than react. It portrays a sense of honesty, trust, respect, and boundaries that is fair and clear. I was so glad to have this training as it has greatly helped me with classroom management.

My students have loved using some of the apps from our Storytelling training. It is a great way for students of mine, particularly those who are quieter, to use a device to create a story using ideas from home and school. Students love to create fantasy stories using Toontastic. It has especially been a great tool for my pre-readers.

Overall, what I love most about the CJL classes is connecting with other educators in the community. It is a great way for all of us to come together and collaborate on what is best for our students. I have met so many new teachers; it is always nice to hear their classroom stories.

